

FREE ADVENTURE: BATTLE FOR THE UNDERCITY

DRAGON+

D&D LIVE AT
MELTDOWN



FROM
STARTUP
TO IPO

FORGING THE
FORGOTTEN
REALMS



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ISSUE 8

DRAGON+ 8

Welcome to Dragon+ Issue 8

I have a confession to make. I currently spend more time watching other people play D&D than I do playing it.



D&D Live from Meltdown

Bringing the thunder from D&D's latest live event!



Acquisitions Inc

This feature contains adults using adult language. You have been warned.



Volo's Guide to Befriending Giants

by Ed Greenwood



100 Dungeon Master Tips

By Mike Shea

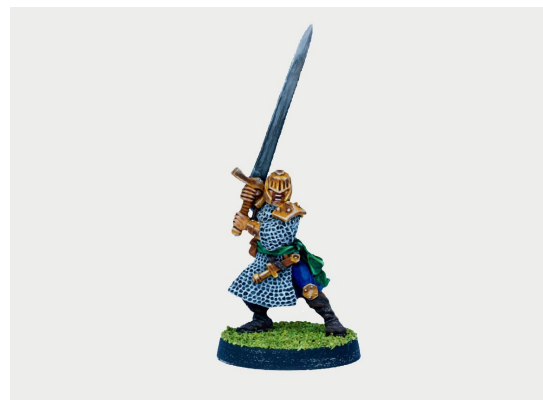


She Kills Monsters

Qui Nguyen's stage play is a combination of madcap comedy and heartbreaking coming-of-age drama, all told inside a D&D module from the '90s. Matt Chapman spoke to Lance Gharavi, the director of a new production at Arizona State University.



The Best of the Dungeon Masters Guild



The Tiny Origin of D&D



Power Leveling in Neverwinter:

10 Essential tips, tricks, and tactics



Forging the Forgotten Realms

Ed Greenwood recalls the birth of the Forgotten Realms, talks about his new novel *Death Masks* and offers sage advice for *Dungeon Masters Guild* creators.



Unearthed Arcana: Feats

Mike Mearls discusses the mightiest of feats



Sage Advice

Jeremy Crawford chairs the monthly column that gives official clarification of D&D rules, and provides reference documents to help your D&D campaign run smoothly. The first rule of Sage Advice? Jeremy's word is the definitive one.

Comic: *Against the*

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Giants

Two classic adventures re-imagined

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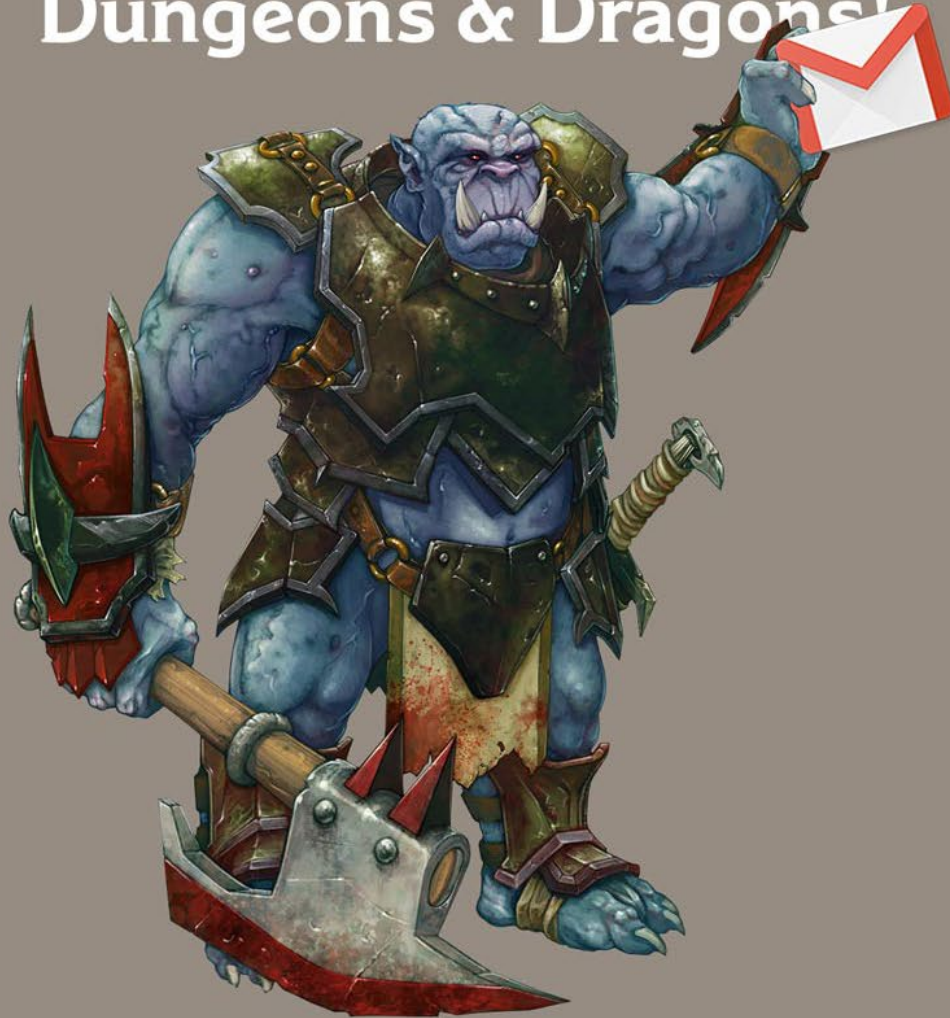
There's no need to cast Divination to discover next issue's goodies: we speak to Forgotten Realms creator Ed Greenwood about his latest novel, remember Dungeons & Dragons videogames gone by and dig deep into the latest action RPG *Sword Coast Legends*.



A big thank you to the extended D&D family for their help with the creation of this issue.

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DRAGON+ 8

Welcome to Dragon+ Issue 8

I have a confession to make. I currently spend more time watching other people play D&D than I do playing it.

Chris Perkins

In the world of the Forgotten Realms, dragons and giants are ancient enemies. Following on the success of the *Tyranny of Dragons* story, I wanted to tell a story about giants that would rekindle this bygone conflict and catch adventurers in the middle of it.



The story of *Storm King's Thunder* is easy to summarize. The giant gods have shattered the ordning, which gives structure to giant society and enables the storm giants to impose their will on their lesser kin. Evil giants are free to run amok, while the storm giants' efforts to restore the ordning are thwarted by an enemy hidden in their midst. Meanwhile,

dragons throughout the North are taking note of the giants' uprising and preparing for the inevitable.

I want to take this opportunity to share a few interesting factoids about *Storm King's Thunder*.

Tyranny and Thunder

Tyranny of Dragons and *Storm King's Thunder* go hand in hand and work together to tell a bigger story about the perils of living on the Sword Coast. However, we don't assume that the heroes who faced Tiamat at the Well of Dragons are the same heroes who must now contend with the rampaging giants. Our assumption is that the heroes of *Tyranny of Dragons* are either dead or retired, and that new heroes have come forward to deal with the giant threat.

The Great Gygax

Our giants story would not exist had Gary Gyax, co-creator of *Dungeons & Dragons*, not written the original "G" series of adventures: *Steading of the Hill Giant Chief*, *Glacial Rift of the Frost Giant Jarl*, and *Hall of the Fire Giant King*. The giant foes in *Storm King's Thunder* are the spiritual descendants of Chief Nosnra, Jarl Grugnur, and King Snurre—three of the greatest villains in D&D history.

Lear the Giant-King

In 1998, I bought and edited an adventure for publication in *Dungeon* magazine titled "Lear the Giant-King," written by Mike Selinker. It was a brilliant adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, with giants cast in the major roles. That adventure (like many others) has a strange power over me, and I felt compelled to draw upon it for inspiration while developing the story for *Storm King's Thunder*. However, contrary to reports online, our story is not the story of *King Lear*. That's been done.

Puny Adventurers

Giants are scarier at low level, which is why *Storm King's Thunder* puts out the call for fledgling heroes rather than seasoned veterans. That being said, one can skip over the lower-level parts of the story and hurl higher-level heroes into the giant lairs: the hill giant den of Grudd Haug, the stone giant warrens of Deadstone Cleft, the frost giant iceberg fortress of Svardborg, the fire giant forge of Ironslag, the cloud giant castle of Lyn Armaal, and the storm giants' undersea stronghold of Maelstrom. These locations are modular and can be used as standalone adventure locations.

Assault on Icewind Dale

Our partners at Cryptic Studios are telling a piece of the giant story in *Neverwinter*. Heroes are drawn north, to the frigid realm of Icewind Dale, to wrest an artifact called the *Ring of Winter* from the clutches of evil frost giants. If the heroes fail, the frost giants will bring about the Age of Everlasting Ice and rise to the top of a new ordning. In the course of fighting the giants, the heroes find magic items inscribed with ancient runes that unlock tremendous power.

Rune Magic

Runes are relics of an age when dragons and giants ruled the world, and rune magic is the lost art whereby these ancient symbols can be inscribed on magic items. An adventurer who finds such a magic item can transfer its rune to another magic item, turning an ordinary *+1 sword* into a much more powerful weapon, for example. Different runes carry different powers within them. For instance, the *krig* rune has magical powers tied to war and battle, while the *wyrm* rune bestows powers that grant draconic abilities or enable one to better combat dragons.

Wyrm of the North

If you're a Realms fan, you'll find plenty of Easter eggs in *Storm King's Thunder*. For example, the story features appearances by not one, not two, not three, not four, but FIVE dragons from "Wyrm of the North," a classic series of D&D articles written by Ed Greenwood (creator of the Forgotten Realms) and published in *Dragon* magazine many years ago.

Infinite Stories

Tyranny of Dragons and *Storm King's Thunder* remind us that dragons and giants have always been part of the Forgotten Realms. These aren't world-ending threats, but rather world-*defining* ones. They and other monsters are the reason why the Sword Coast needs brave heroes to defend it. Dragons and giants aren't going away, and we'll see them again in future stories. But there are also other stories to tell, other realms to visit, and other villains to face. D&D is a bottomless well of story possibilities. If you see me at a convention or catch me online, tell me what stories tickle your fancy and what

other iconic D&D monsters deserve their time in the spotlight. I'm all ears.

Chris Perkins, Principal Story Designer

Follow Chris Perkins on [Twitter](#)

Illustration by Joshua Niedzwiecki

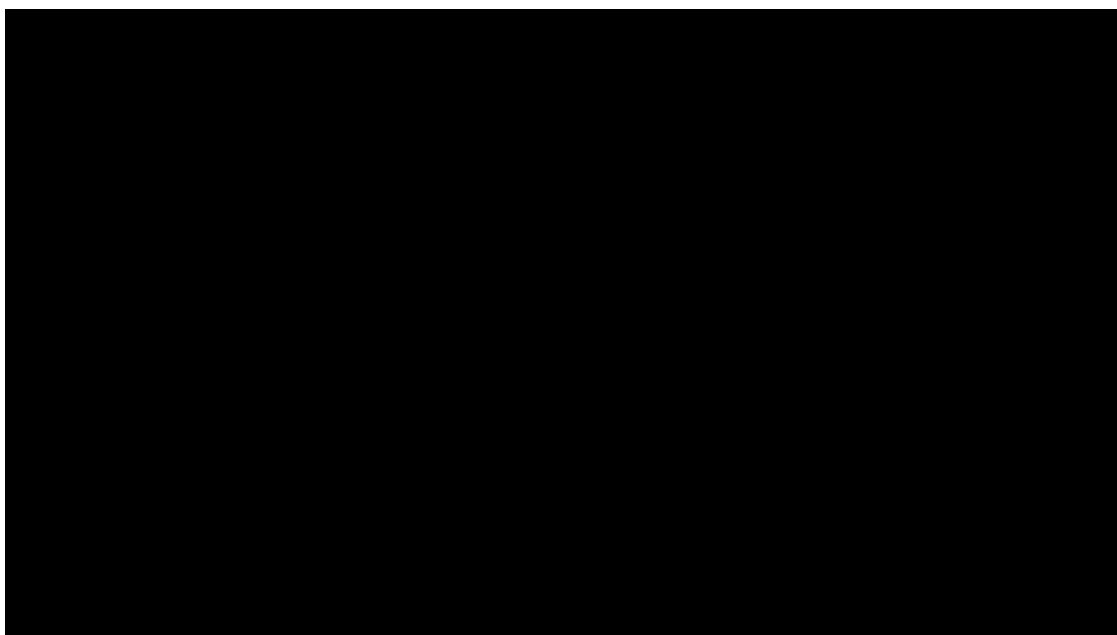


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D&D Live from Meltdown

Bringing the thunder from D&D's latest live event!



Meltdown Comics is the perfect venue for D&D Live. By the entrance, just across the way from the homemade TARDIS and the wall of D&D comics, a production team is setting up their live streaming equipment. In the back of the store, D&D Live host Alison Haislip is working on the script with the teleprompter operator. An hour later, Wizards of the Coast's Mike Mearls and Chris Perkins will do the same. Eventually, the script will be given a final polish to bring it up to each presenter's exacting personal standard and the show will begin, two hours of live D&D events including the exciting debut of new campaign the *Storm King's Thunder*.



Matthew Mercer is the DM

But first, this opening scene takes place in the back of Meltdown Comics on the NerdMelt Showroom; a dingy room that has assuredly seen countless Los Angeles dreams come and go. You can feel a thousand failed improv groups haunting the stage's brick walls like so many ghosts in need of busting. The comedians who have "made it" are performing on the bones of those who haven't. Yet.



For those of you who've never been to Meltdown Comics, it's the perfect venue for D&D Live. The store is nestled in Los Angeles' West Hollywood neighborhood—where every third person you meet is a comedian with a podcast, some of whom are regular Meltdown customers.



Chris Hardwick as Whil Wea-Ton (Elf Wizard)

As comic sales begin to wind down, trendy West Side bartenders take over the registers in the middle of the store, setting up their liquid smoke containers and dry ice. These ingredients will be mixed into drinks that bear the name of famous D&D potions. Anecdotally, the most popular drink seemed to be the Elixir of Life—a sweet beverage topped with flowers and bubbling with dry ice. It was fantastic; for all the well-deserved jabs mixology gets, the practice does make for some legitimately delicious cocktails masquerading as heady D&D potions.



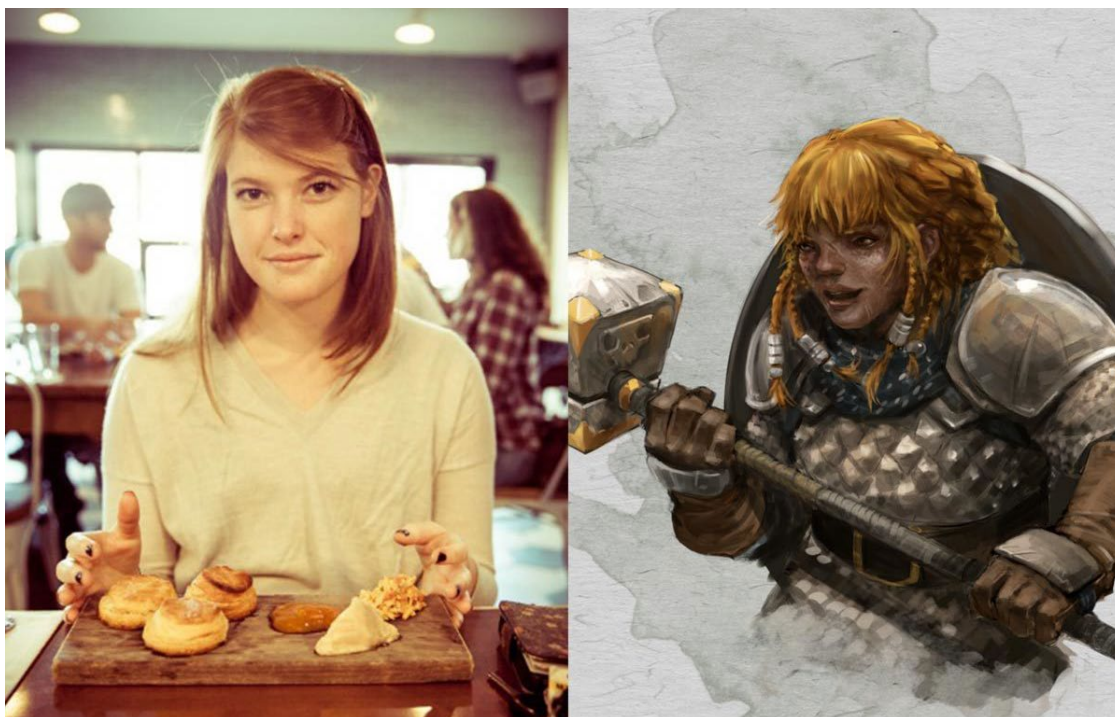
Ashley Johnson as Dagny Halvor (Half-Orc Cleric of Gond)

That dichotomy encapsulates the vibe inside the store. Everything about the West Side of Los Angeles is almost oppressively *trendy*, right down to its celebrity-sponsored comic shops. But when there's a visible sense of authenticity powering the enterprise, it works. Meltdown has a sweeping variety of independent products sharing real estate with this week's *Civil War II #1*.



Even without Meltdown's vibrant customer base, the D&D team make the store buzz with energy. They have a handful of hours to put on a show, one that requires juggling both talent and web video

production equipment. Anyone who's ever tried to produce any kind of live event will tell you that production is an improvisational, heavily collaborative art. There were many times where Haislip leapt up in front of the crowd, instantly amplifying the room's energy and expertly transitioning to a new segment, only to have a chorus from the back restart the live countdown. "20...19...18..." they'd yell, forcing Haislip and her guest to quickly re-establish their chemistry on the fly.



Shelby Fero as Brawlwin Chainminer (Dwarf Fighter)

In that respect, playing D&D isn't very different from producing a live broadcast. Both consist of like-minded people working together to smack down problems as soon they appear, like a game of Whack-a-Mole where everyone has their hand on the hammer. In lieu of dice rolls, live broadcasts have the invisible hand of fate simultaneously protecting and sabotaging their teeming mass of cables. Is camera left no longer transmitting? Could be the tricaster, could be the SDI converter, could be the camera itself. It doesn't matter what's wrong; you've got just minutes to improvise a new rig, so grab that producer's iPhone, plug in a HDMI converter, and let that sucker rip, because the only other option is being stuck with a blind spot for your whole show. There's a lot of imagination and thinking outside of the box at play in both activities.



Jonah Ray as Joppa (Human Monk)

As the players of Force Grey: Giant Hunters sat down on stage for the first time, the group exuded a palpable sense of excitement mixed with a bit of trepidation. Some of the players, such as Shelby Fero and Utkarsh Ambudkar, were sitting down to play D&D for the first time. For them, everything was novel, from their characters' statistics to rolling the dice and scoring a critical hit (or critical failure!).

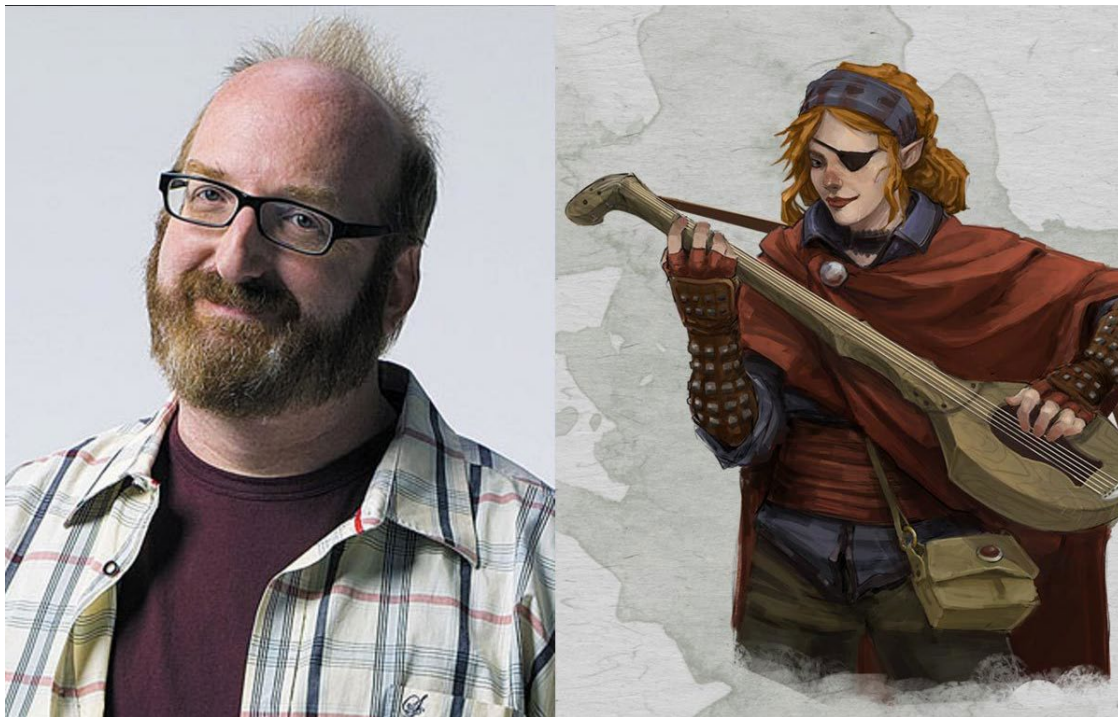
“Critical hits are fun, don’t get me wrong, but those are more for the player’s joy,” said Matthew Mercer, voice actor, superstar Dungeon Master and the lead DM on Geek and Sundry’s Critical Role, as well as for the Nerdist’s upcoming Force Grey: Giant Hunters. “For roleplaying and narrative, I find critical misses lead to raised stakes and creative ways to weave a more interesting narrative.”



Utkarsh Ambudkar as Hitch (Human Rogue)

“That’s part of what’s great about the roleplaying experience,” Mercer added. “It is communal improvisation. The thrill is that nobody—not even the Dungeon Master—knows what’s next.”

This sort of interplay at the table wasn’t invented for the entertainment of the audience, at least from Mercer’s perspective. “Our criteria for even streaming [Critical Role], when we were talking with Geek and Sundry, was that we don’t change what we do. We aren’t playing for the audience—that just happened organically,” Mercer said. “Once we were in the zone, it really wasn’t much different.”



Brian Posehn as Calliope (Half-Elf Bard)

Chris Perkins, principle story designer for D&D, had a different experience running Acquisitions Inc. campaigns on the main stage of many Penny Arcade Expos. “They are meant to be theatrical, they are not the way I run my home games,” Perkins said. “The Acquisitions, Inc. stuff is meant to be over the top, stupid, and situationally absurd.”

If the first session of Force Grey: Giant Hunters was any indication, the series, which debuts on the **Nerdist** in July, promises to be a blast. With a mix of absurd over-the-top entertainment and organic improvisation between the group’s members, the only thing that seems certain is that it’s likely to include a hell of a lot of laughs.

Force Grey: Giant Hunters

Superstar Dungeon Master Matt Mercer is joined live on stage by the all-star cast of Force Grey: Giant Hunters, featuring Utkarsh Ambudkar, Jonah Ray, Brian Posehn, Shelby Fero, Ashley Johnson and Chris Hardwick, all eager to play the prologue of Storm King's Thunder.



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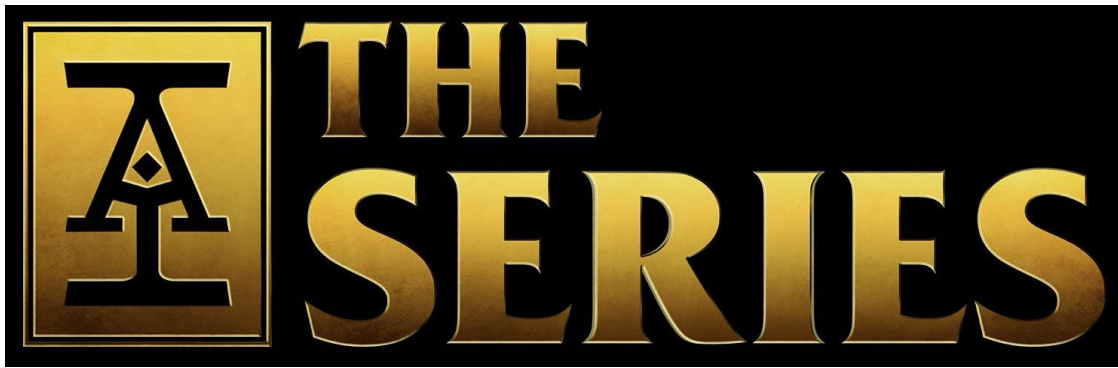


Acquisitions Inc

This feature contains adults using adult language.
You have been warned.

“We should have known because all we do is win, win, win no matter what. We’ve got money on my mind, we can’t never get enough. Jerry walks into a room and all the hands go up,” sings Scott Kurtz. “And they stay there!” belts out Jerry Holkins in response, the pair channeling DJ Khaled’s hit *All I do is Win*.

[Watch the Series](#)



THE SERIES

Catch the weekly adventures of the Acquisitions Incorporated team!

[Watch Now](#)

Chatting with the Acquisitions Incorporated team is—as you may have gathered—as much fun as watching one of their live Dungeons & Dragons stage shows. Kurtz, Holkins and Mike Krahulik started Acquisitions Incorporated as a podcast back in 2008, with Chris Perkins acting as Dungeon Master. Holkins and Krahulik had already made a name for themselves as the founders of Penny Arcade, while fellow web comic Kurtz had found success with PvP (and later Table Titans). Holkins has to take credit for the adventuring party’s name, though. And as the team suggests, it could have been so much worse.



“Whenever anyone needs something named around here, they come to me, old Jerry. That’s



my task. So I'm glad it's sort of a cool name, otherwise we'd have to refer to it by a dumb name all the time," says Holkins. "It could have gone another way if Jerry had not been in charge of naming. We could have been working on Binwin's Boner Patrol," Kurtz adds, and Holkins fires back, "That's right. The BBP. But it's true that when we started we didn't really know a hundred percent how it was going to go. Early on we didn't understand, I don't think, that it would be a brand that we would one day want to protect."

Dragon+ can't help thinking the BBP has a cool ring to it, if that's what the group ended up being called. After all, the players openly mock Krahulik in the original audio podcast for wanting to call his character Jim Darkmagic (Listen the mockery in episode one of [Dungeon Delve](#)). Yet now the name has clout. "I'm usually ahead of my time," says the man who introduced himself to us as Jem Dickmagic. "A lot of times it takes six or seven years to come around to my genius."



Humble Beginnings

The early gaming sessions set the tone for the group. Holkins was an active D&D player, Kurtz was a lapsed player from his younger days, and Mike had never played the game. “If you spend any time in roleplaying games at all, you’re almost always with groups of really varied experience. We had a very interesting blend, which sort of maxes itself out even there, as each of us touches on a specific part of the experience,” says Holkins. “Our games were an engaging mix of occasionally serious story content with a lot of just riffing at the table, like an *MST3K* thing in some ways.”



While their regular shows were broadcast to the world, the group claims they didn't know what kind of following the game had at that stage. The first inkling that the podcasts were popular was when they transferred it to the stage. "We just thought it would be fun to do it live and see if that would even work," Holkins remembers. "We were waiting out in the wings in this sort of industrial, mechanical corridor. We're getting stuff on and Wil's putting on his cloak or whatever, you'd got a gorget. And we were like, 'Let's try it, let's see how it goes.'



And when I came out the entire room was full, and there were people standing up. That's the thing about working on the internet. There's some metrics you can look at but actually seeing a room full of people is very different."



ORIGIN STORIES

Find the remastered audio adventures of Acquisitions Incorporated in Dungeon Delve, a podcast featuring live play D&D with introductions from Chris Perkins." Dungeon Delve on iTunes.

“The archive goes way back. And there’s even a diversion into another game world, with a very short Dark Sun campaign, what I guess you would consider some apocrypha,” recalls Holkins. “Scott, that’s when a doctor sticks needles into you to heal you,” teases Krahulik.

LISTEN NOW

“I was pumping gas and across from us was another family whose dad was pumping gas. This little kid in the car sees me and throws himself up against the glass and just stares at me pie-eyed and starts freaking out. And I was like, ‘Yeah, right, am I your first fat person? Take it all in kid.’ And then the dad looks at the kid, sees him staring at someone and says, ‘Oh shit, it’s you. We watch you on TV.’ And I said, ‘No. I’m not on TV.’ And he says, ‘Yes. You’re the dwarf, my son and I watch you on TV. You’re in the D&D show. We love you guys. We watch all of those.’ But it was weird because they weren’t even at PAX. YouTube is so, what’s the word, the O-word?”

“Oprah?” Holkins offers. “Omnipresent. YouTube’s so omnipresent now that it’s interchangeable with TV for the younger generation.”

“Then my wife and I went to see Alton Brown at The Paramount. We’re sitting there and I’m saying how gorgeous the venue is. She says, ‘You’ve never noticed that before?’ And I say, ‘It’s my first time here.’ And she’s like, ‘You fill this room all the time. You’ve played this room. Where we came in is the front. We normally come in at the back.’ And I reply, ‘What the fuck are we doing in these seats then?’”



Fame & Fortune

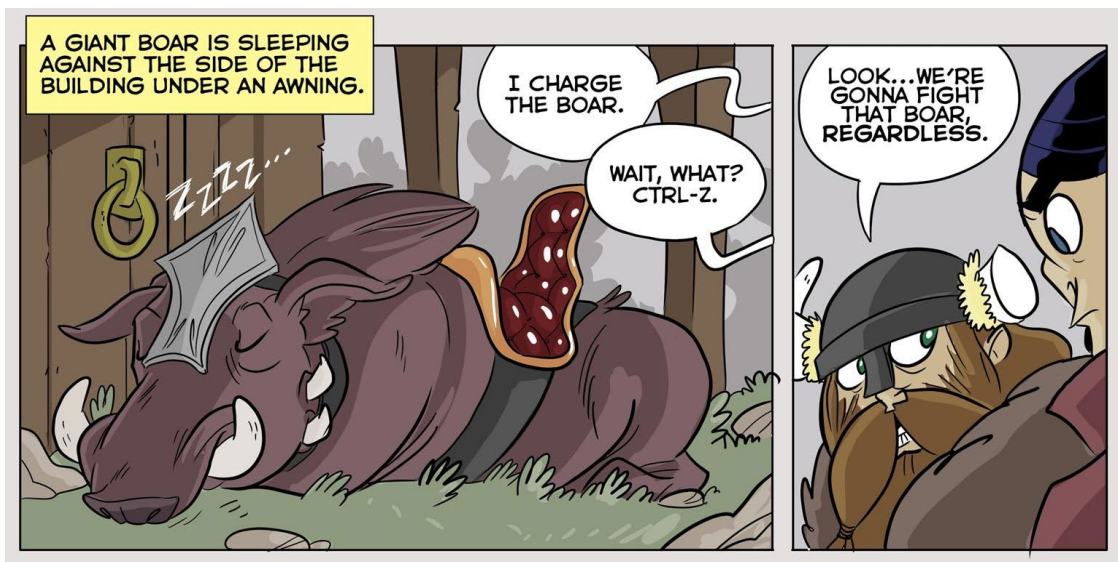
Kurtz acknowledges that the larger the show has got, the more elaborate it has become. He recalls how a character may start out with a cape, then everyone's going to wear costumes. Add in amazing set pieces, and suddenly you're backstage and there's a smoke machine...

"And you're standing there and you look at Mike and he says, 'This is our life, this is our life!'" Kurtz recalls. "I remember that," Krahulik says. "And you can hear everyone screaming for you," Kurtz continues. "And it's like you're a rock star, except you don't play any instruments and no girls want to fuck you for this." "Speak for yourself, Binwin," Krahulik counters, sounding very much like the ladies' man Jim Darkmagic has become. "I'm sorry. No girls want to fuck me. My wife's not even impressed," Kurtz says. "She told me that," Krahulik adds, continuing the banter.



Not that this success appears to have changed any of them. When we mention the fame, the trio admit to almost feeling a little guilty about it. “Most of the country right now is hurting so bad that Trump seems like a good idea. And we play D&D for a living. When you’re on the bus to the airport and someone’s complaining about the minimum wage, you don’t bring it up. You want to keep it on the down low,” says Kurtz. “If you try and explain this to somebody, about halfway through the story, you will apologize,” agrees Holkins.

We’re keen to know if the fame has had any other impacts. For example, every Acquisitions Incorporated podcast opens with the phrase: “This podcast contains adults using adult language. You have been warned.” Has the increased attention led to a need to tone things down for a more mainstream audience?



“There was a show where we didn’t have monitors on the stage, so I was having a really hard time hearing everyone. All I could hear was the audience screaming, and I snapped,” says Kurtz. “At one point I scream at the audience, ‘Who’s fucking this chicken, you or me?’ I can’t believe I said that. Needless to say, I received notes from the network afterwards.” “Keep the chicken fucking to a minimum?” asks Holkins. “Keep the chicken fuckery on the down low,” confirms Kurtz.

Screen Time

Fame might not have changed any of the players, but it has led to a higher profile for them and their Dungeon Master. Inevitably, that has seen them branch out from the main Acquisitions Incorporated game. Chris Perkins recently brought his AI character Portobello DaVinci to the *Neverwinter* **MMORPG** in a link up with the yearly Respen’s Marvelous Game “I was surprised to see that video. But that was some very cool shit. It’s so strange to see that greasy looking digital Chris,” says Holkins.



Having introduced Acquisitions Incorporated into that MMO world, we can’t help but make a comparison with the digital comedy *Red vs. Blue*. Set in the *Halo* video game universe, its



collection of hilarious characters eventually appeared in a set of missions in an actual *Halo* game. (Oddly, some of the Rooster Teeth team behind Red vs. Blue recently started their own D&D show. Check out Heroes and Halfwits in Video & Audio Highlights in this issue of Dragon+!) Can we expect to see some missions in *Neverwinter* fe

aturing the Acquisitions Incorporated crew as NPCs? “I’m sure we know somebody over there, let’s give them a call,”

Holkins says tantalizingly.

Where they will definitely be appearing is in their new web series. Having built up a following for their PAX games, viewers can now get a more regular hit of AI’s adventures. We can also confirm that this will feature some shocks and surprises, because even before we’ve started to talk about it properly, Kurtz spills a *huge* secret. The other members shut down any further discussion on the topic before we can take it any further—and we’re forbidden from revealing anything here—but Holkins assures us viewers need to keep their “ocular stalks focused on the series for fascinating revelations.”



The series is part of the overall continuity of the Acquisitions Inc. storyline, and picks up where we last saw our heroes before the one-off sessions at the recent PAX East. It will lead up to the game at PAX West, so where the series ends, that game begins. Acquisitions Incorporated The Series also serves as a preview to some exciting stuff going in the upcoming adventure Storm King's Thunder.

“I’m very excited about it,” says Holkins. “As I said, this was the year we wanted to be serious about this. We originally made this thing because we thought it would be fun, but now we’ve been entrusted with this really cool thing that people like, I want to make the most of it.”

Does it feel weird to be back in a room with just five people, having got used to the theatre of the live game? “You start to miss it,” admits Holkins. “Acquisitions Incorporated has really lived as a live theatre creature for a long time now. It’s odd going back to a place where there isn’t an audience, because they’re always telling us what to do. They’re giving us legitimately good suggestions a lot of the time.”

Added Extras

Acquisitions Incorporated may be synonymous with its three founding members, but the group has also shared the spotlight with other players. Maintaining the corporate image, these have traditionally taken the form of interns.



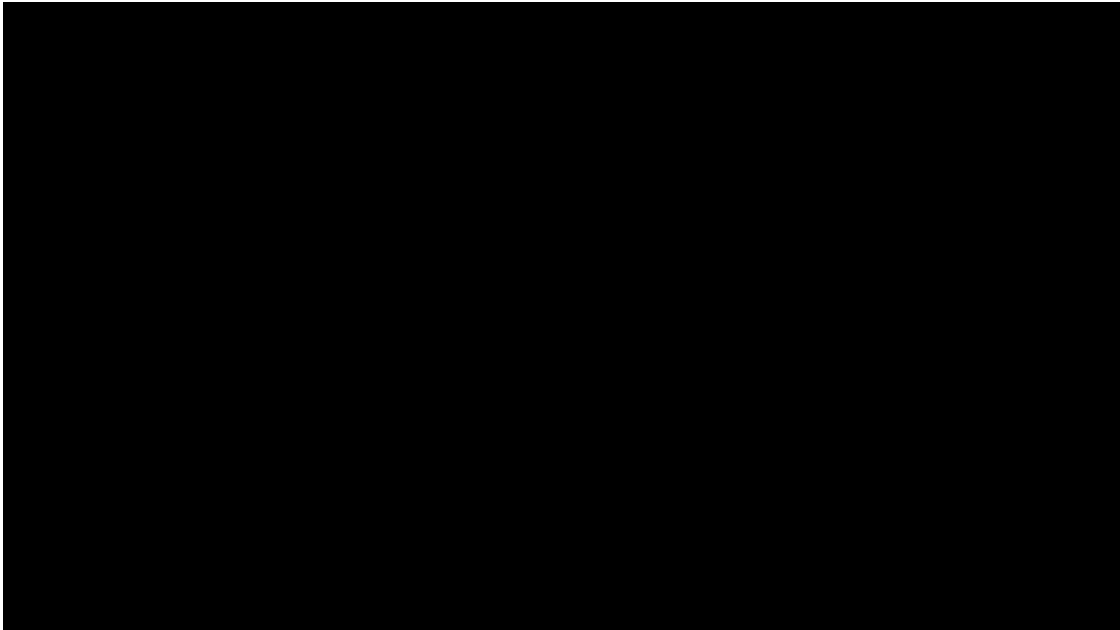
“PAX acts as an attractor for lots of interesting people. When we can we try to incorporate them,” explains Holkins. “Wil Wheaton was coming to do a keynote at PAX, which we call Storytime. And since he was there anyway, it seemed like a cool opportunity.”

“But he maintains a gruesome schedule. He’s prodigious. And there was a time where he had a conflict. I believe he was being called upon to gallivant in a global arena. And as I said, the locus of PAX is at the center of many ley lines and so it attracted a modern day sorcerer like Patrick Rothfuss. It’s my understanding that he was a member of the Penny Arcade forums for a while. Then when his first book came out, a couple of copies came to the office and we fell in love with it.”



“We were overjoyed that he agreed to come on and be a part of our thing. He’s just been great. Mike and Scott have a good thing, but Pat is a kindred spirit for me. We have a really good time working together. Occasionally I’ll stop the entire game just to tell him

something I think he will enjoy. And then we allow the game to continue. It might not be the most professional, but if Patrick Rothfuss is there, it's hard not to geek out.”



PAX East 2016 also took another unexpected turn, as Dungeon Master extraordinaire Perkins vacated his seat in favor of playing a session. “He is *the* Dungeon Master,” enthuses Holkins. But who could take the place of such a legendary leader? First Krahulik treated the audience to a mini-adventure based around Jim Darkmagic’s birthday party, then Rothfuss riffed off his intern status in a longer adventure (see Box Out).

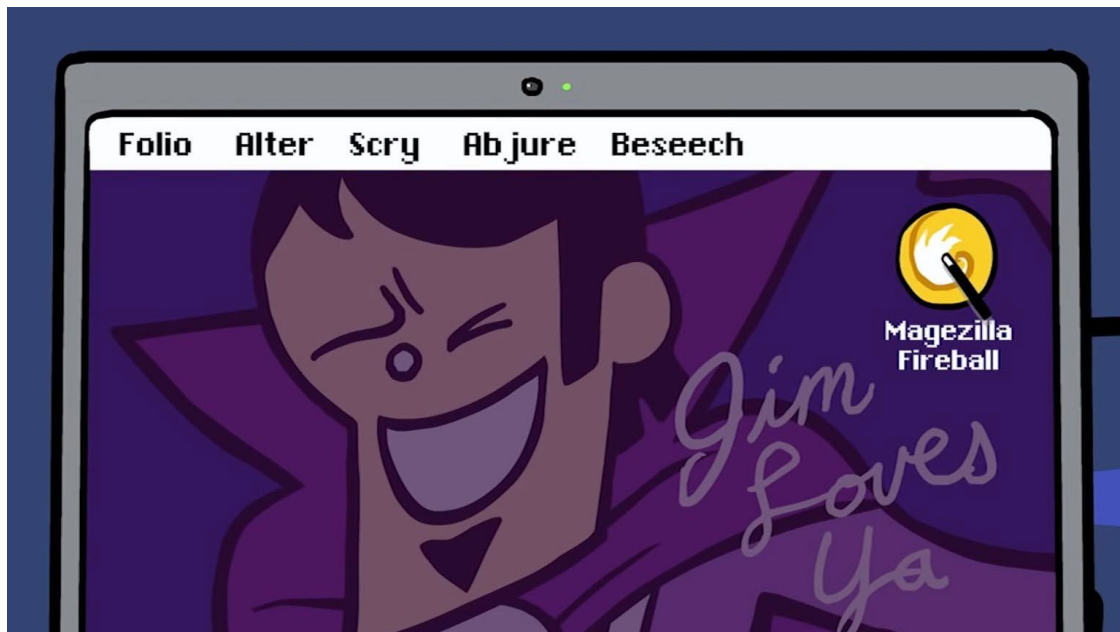
Krahulik was understandably nervous beforehand. “What Chris does is amazing. I feel confident as a Dungeon Master with my friends, but I had never Dungeon Mastered fifth edition before. When you’re playing with the guy that wrote the rulebook, it’s intimidating,” he says. “There’s two ways that can go. I decided I could get up there and try to play every rule exactly as it is out of the book, and if I didn’t know it, I would look to him for help. Or I could say fuck it and play D&D however I felt like it. That’s what I decided to do. That’s what most Dungeon Masters do. But it’s very nice that they write down the rules for you, it’s a good guideline.”



Franchise Rights

Acquisitions Incorporated wouldn't be living up to its name if it didn't engage in some moneymaking operations. "How dare you sir," exclaims Kurtz when we suggest AI is now the Donald Trump of D&D. "If this was a regular interview, I'd take my microphone off and stomp out," Holkins adds with fake outrage. "I will build a great magical wall," jokes Krahulik, and Kurtz quickly follows up with, "Our merchandise is tremendous. We make the best t-shirts."

In all seriousness, though, the team finally seems to have recognized the opportunities and are starting to address them. "The reality is that Mike, Scott and I have pretty robust companies. And I think as a result we didn't take as much advantage of Acquisitions Incorporated as we could," Holkins agrees. "So whenever I saw an opportunity to build more Acquisitions Incorporated type stuff into my schedule, I did it."



They're keen to share some of the goodies fans can now finally get their hands on. These include character coins, featuring Jim and Omin, although the Binwin coin, which can be used to open beer bottles, sounds amazing ("It's very on brand," says Kurtz). "We have a green flame shirt," Kraulik continues. "We're also working on Acquisitions Incorporated DM screens, dice boxes, pouches, lotions, a line of custom odors," adds Holkins, causing Kraulik to ask, "Not scents? Odors." Things are certainly stepping up.

"In fairness though, I think timing is everything on stuff like merchandise," explains Kurtz. "One mistake a lot of people make when they start up a new project is that they make a t-shirt with their logo on it before they have a month's worth of content. That makes good kindling when they can't pay the gas bills. So it seems like we waited a long time but we needed to establish a rapport, if you will. Did we err on the side of waiting? Sure. But now the floodgates are open and it's time to drink from the fire hose."

"We're considering a line of fire hoses," Holkins deadpans. As the CEO of Acquisitions Incorporated, you're only ever halfway sure he's kidding.

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Volo's Guide to Befriending Giants

by Ed Greenwood

Well met again, gentles all! 'Tis I, Volothamp Geddarm, once more thy humble scribe, endeavoring to entertain and enlighten with my paltry pen. This time, the focus of my admittedly meandering discourse shall be the Great Folk: giants.

Lumbering brutes to some, while to others, marauding monsters who bash and roast folk alive on spits for their meals and cloud-castle-dwelling superhumans of sophisticated, even decadent culture.

Let me confess that it was not my original intent to wax loquacious about giants. I was engaged on a longer and more varied project, one which a certain Elminster of Shadowdale encouraged me to pursue years upon years ago (before those tumultuous events sometimes referred to as “the Spellplague”). As I recall, he termed it “Hardly more dangerous than the prying and meddling into the affairs of thy fellow humans—and less annoying to the rest of us, which may mean

ye live a *little* longer.”

Cheering words, to be sure, but being Volo, I took them as encouragement, and so began work that even now is bearing fruit, in the form of a modest little tome I am pleased to call *Volo's Guide to Monsters*.

Yes, I have been faring far over the wilderlands of Faerûn, observing beasts both fearsome and strange as they prowl, prey upon, and otherwise interact with the rest of us. I have gathered details of passing interest, of solid entertainment value, and some that are quite possibly vital to your survival and mine, if we fall afoul of this or that “monster.”

Recently, I set forth from the fair city of Waterdeep into the Sword Coast northlands, seeking a few answers and details to provide the finishing touches to this latest of my bestselling and widely-celebrated *Guides*.

Perilous work, to be sure. Yet, possessed of my bright wits, my boundless optimism, the shining good fortune that seems to accompany me everywhere as Tymora's everpresent bright cloak of favor, the deep wisdom I have built in my long and eventful life of stellar judgment, prudence, and all-encompassing modesty—not to mention girded with my own small spellcraft and certain magics gifted me by Elminster and the Lady Laeral (“To see thee safely far, far away,” the Sage of Shadowdale told me fondly)—I set out alone to scour the wild Savage Frontier in search of more monster lore.

It did not go well.

I lost an eyebrow—my left, for those keeping score—to an annoyed peryton when escaping from its nest on a frigid crag overlooking Phandalin; sacrificed the tip of my left little finger to the cause of winning free of an ettercap web garotte that was festooned with the rusting daggers, sickles, and handaxes of the creature's earlier victims;



acquired a scar down my left shin from the longest reaching talon of a wyvern's claw that *nearly* severed my leg but instead merely laid half of it open down to the bones; and still have recurring vivid nightmares thanks to a mind flayer tentacle that *almost* extracted my brain. (Elminster asked caustically if I was certain about that "almost," and intimated neither I nor wider Faerûn would discern a difference in a Volo with his brain and a Volo without, but that is churlish calumny unbecoming of an archwizard who's been closer than most mortals ever get with Mystra, and I shall dismiss it as such).

Nor is this a comprehensive listing of my scrapes and near-fatalities; suffice it to say that I have good, firm, and plentiful personal reasons to know that there is a genuine and pressing need for *Volo's Guide to Monsters*, as treating with wild beasts in their wilderland habitat is neither a safe nor a simple pursuit.

To cut a long fireside tale short, I ranged far and wide over the lands that have sometimes been called the Sword Coast North and have also been known as the Savage Frontier, and matters took a turn to the giantish (oh, yes, that's a word; as proof, I direct you to the bard Rulglathier's *Ode To A Hero Giantish*, which has had at least four chapbook editions that I know of; I particularly recommend the ballad "His Club It Shook The Hills Around"). My journeys took me into the Upper Rauvin Vale, in a region of many rolling hills lightly cloaked in scrub woodland (the sort of terrain folk of the North call "wolf country" because wolf packs maraud across it with such ease).

In the end, I made a friend. Of a giant. Yet the road to that friendship

was neither peaceful nor safe. (Yes, I'll get to it. Promise. Have I ever lied to you before?).



Dwellings in the North

A general note for the wayfarer: the Sword Coast North has the tendency to be cold even in the warmest months, thanks to pitiless winds sweeping across the countryside, but it is a lightly-populated landscape, and so teeming with life because human hunters haven't been so numerous and persistent as to scour out its

bounty in the way they have in, say, the Heartlands. Moreover, aside from the frigid eastern verges of this region, where the Northlands give way to the frozen northernmost Anauroch, this is a well-watered land; drinkable springs, pools, lakes, and streams are *everywhere*. So it follows that wells and drought are almost unheard-of and a settlement can be located just about anywhere, if sufficient folk see a need for one.

In the past, energetic bugbear and hobgoblin raiding bands, hungry dragon attacks from the air, and recurring orc hordes frequently swept away settlements that weren't also defensive strongpoints. These scourges all still occur, and have recently been joined by widespread giant violence (of which I'll write more, later on), yet so much is afoot in the region, human prospecting and homesteading prominent among current activities, that more settlements are being founded—and are surviving—than ever before. So whereas the intrepid traveler in the North a century ago was either part of a large, well-armed caravan, or was very much on their own, these days a wayfarer can dare to hope that there might be at least a fortified stead, if not a way-inn, over the next hill, or within a day's crawl.

That does not, however, mean any certainty of refuge, aid, or assistance, as I learned to my personal cost.

A Warning, And A Rescue

I made the mistake of hiring guides in a less than reputable taproom to conduct me to where I might meet with “any giants more eloquent than hill giants” nearby (so I could parley with, and learn more about, them). Tavernmaster Bhaerlo Uldryn recommended the Malvurtarl family, a clan of outlying steaders, as “the hardest” local veteran trappers, hunters, and prospectors. I met with them, struck a deal (1 gp each/day, for two Malvurtarl brothers in the prime of life), paid for the first day up front, and was led east, on foot. We trudged for a day, drifting south to the northern edge of Turlang’s Wood—it struck me that the Malvurtarls did so more as a navigational aid than anything else—along the Upper Rauvin Vale, then turned our back on the woods and strode straight north “for at least five hills” as the most talkative Malvurtarl put it, “to get good and clear of yon woods, so any watchers won’t see our fire and come out by night to *feed*.”



Cheery advice, to be sure, and the supper they fed me was curious: fire-toasted slabs of black nutbread dripping with boarfat butter, and washed down with skin after skin of wine, until my head fairly spun. They told me much of the recent history of the north, notably that giants, after being little more than tales in the Sword Coast North for the last few decades, were suddenly everywhere—on the move and as violent as the orcs and ogres and trolls of the Frozenfar had ever been. (They also, by the way, told me that only “outlanders” who owned maps called the rolling hills we were traversing “the Upper Rauvin Vale”—to locals, this region was “the Hills” though they admitted they’d never seen that name written down anywhere, least of all on a map.)

And then, as they droned on and clouds like slow gray smoke scudded across the sky and blotted

out the magnificent cloak of stars, warmed and numbed by all the drink they'd plied me with, I fell asleep.

Only my bladder saved me. It's not an admission I'm proud to make, but it's true; my pressing need to water the cold hills around me awakened me just as my guides were about to murder me.



Or rather, eat me alive. And then seize my valuables (why go to all the trouble and danger of finding a giant, when you can exterminate the client who's hired you to do so, and collect your pay early and in a lump sum?).

I gather their usual method of dealing with victims was to get these chosen unfortunates weary and off alone, and then attack—oh, I nigh forgot to mention: these two Malvurtarls, and possibly the rest of their family, too, are jackalweres.

The ambush would have worked, too, save for my *ring of ironguarding*. Two of them thrust in side-by-side unison, putting all their weight behind shoves that would have pinned me to the ground with half the length of their scimitars through me.

The ring rendered my solid body “not there” to their blades, which, being unopposed by my too unsolid flesh, drove deep into the earth and stuck fast. Not for long, but for long enough for me to roll and scabble frantically to my feet, and *run*.

I must admit that a goodly bit of the legendary Volo's Luck is due to my fleet feet and lightning-swift grasp of when it is advisable to flee. I rapidly became aware that jackalweres, free to shift shape, can easily outpace even a swift human, which meant they would run me down about the time I got winded, which was just over the crest of the first hill.



So I was doomed unless I used my Art. Now, modesty has prevented me informing most I meet with that I have been trained in wizardry by such luminaries as Elminster of Shadowdale, and my spells have won the day a time or two.

So I turned, just beyond the crest of that hill, feigned cowering collapse—and as they raced into view and sprang at me eagerly, gave them fire.

A great wave of it, that lit up the night, and singed their hairy exteriors. The beasts were undeterred, though, and continued on with jaws agape.

They leapt before I could prepare even to scream, let alone work another spell, just as a boulder the size of a horse hurtled out of the night and smashed into the pair, flattening them to bloody pulp and splintered bones.

Being the intrepid man of action and all-seeing observant chronicler that I am, I spun in an instant to face the source of the boulder, and managed to notice a twenty-foot-tall armored warrior striding towards me.

Who as he marched nearer, loomed like a soaring castle tower against the few stars that still glittered through the clouds. He was keen-eyed, his head encased in a dragonskull helm completed with horns and

jutting fangs that framed his flowing white hair and beard, and looked . . . *happy*. He seemed to be on the verge of smiling as he hefted a gleaming battle axe whose head alone looked bigger than my torso.

“Is that all of them, wizard?” His voice was a rough, deep rumble.

“Y-yes,” I managed to reply. Trying to sound calm and unruffled, and failing miserably. “My thanks!”

“Harshnag am I, late of Waterdeep.”

“Oh, me too. And I’ve heard of you. The Gray Hands. You’ve defended the city long and ably. I—Volothamp Geddarm, am at your service. Better known as just ‘Volo.’ I am, ah, not unknown among my kind.”

“Indeed. I have heard *your* name. Twice or thrice.” Harshnag sounded amused.

Ah. I drew myself up. “I stand by what I say and write. Some may call me a fool, but I say what must be said and cleave to truth.”

“And that is both good, and all too rare. I will sit fireside with you, small one.”

“Good, good! This way!” I said, almost babbling in relief, and walking north. A thought struck me, and I fumbled at my belt, then held up my most precious flask. “Elverquisst?”

“I must decline. Hate the stuff. Yet I smell something else on your person that does seem inviting.”

I stared up at the giant, who was striding unhurriedly along beside me now. In the distance, something with gleaming eyes that had been watching us from atop a hill got a good look at him, and hurriedly departed.

What could he possibly—?

The only other thing I was carrying was a skin of water, and a full bottle of some trailmeat in Neverwintan brandy that smelled like it had gone off the last time I’d reseated the cork, but that I hadn’t the heart to throw away, for the brandy was a throatslake new to market,

and had cost me pretty coin . . .

The giant couldn't want rotting meat, surely. I held up the water.

"I'm thirsty, wizard, not dirty."

By the time I'd rehooked the waterskin to my belt and caught sight of the flickering heart of the uncovered campfire, the giant added, "You carry some rothé that's getting ripe and ready, not blood-raw and overburnt like you humans prefer it."

"Oh." Eagerly I handed over the bottle. "Do all giants prefer, ah, well-matured meat? Or just rothé? Or just frost giants? And do all giants have a keen sense of smell?"

"You make the mistake, small one, of considering 'all giants' as unvaried and of one mind. Do all humans prefer the same delicacies? Agree on all matters, and see things the same way?"

"Humans pile mistake upon mistake," I told him. "It is our way."

"I have noticed," Harshnag replied, sitting himself down by the fire. "Most giants seem to have keener noses than humans—certainly the folk of Waterdeep, whose smellers are worn dull by the deep layers of ever-present stink of their own crowding, wastes, cookery, and thing-makings. And most of us like our meat hung and aged. Smoked, though we differ sharply in how, and what woods to use, and what leaves and moss to add to the flames, and all of that."

"Oh? So giants are interested in matters of the table? Cookery? What humans call 'fine dining'?"

"Of course," Harshnag replied, inhaling the foul smell coming out of my hardbottle deeply, in the savoring manner of any wine fancier. "By all means draw me out on the subject by subtle questioning, Volo. I know it's what you do."

Caught. I chuckled, and poked at the fire, then scabbled in the Malvurtarl trailsacks to see what food and drink could be had. Probably not much; the main intended meal, after all, had been me. "Right, then," I said briskly.

So we talked, and I have—as is my wont and my livelihood—set

down what we spoke of, hereafter.



I Befriend a Giant: Giant Cuisine

So let us begin with giant cuisine, as Harshnag and I did, beside the fire. He reiterated that giants are personally as varied as humans in their tastes, fashions, and habits, and that a (brutish, sustenance-hunting) hill giant is a very different being from a (contemplative, isolated) storm giant; what “goes” for one giant may not “go” for the next.

However, I was able to discern some commonalities, at least when it came to filling the belly. Giants tend to be like some small furred foraging predators: they will gorge themselves when they can, to store for leaner times when they must fight, travel, and work hard without sufficient food or drink. Even a giant king living in the lap of well-servanted, abundant luxury will fill up before embarking on idle days of snacking. As a result of this ability to gorge, humans are warned that it is nigh-impossible for one of us “Small Folk” to out-drink any giant. Nor, obviously, out-eat one.

Most giants, however, seem to like mead, but not other sweet drinks, intoxicants or otherwise. Water is a “when we must” drinkable, not a favored one. Popular meal elements include whole roast oxen and boar, particularly rotten or overripe meat, like the trailmeat in my

brandy, as well as honeybread and sharp cheeses (like the black cheese out of Berdusk and Elturel generally known as “Hadanther” after the now-dead cheesemaker who first devised it, and the blood-red cheeses made with wines and brandies in Sheirtalar and the Tashalar, such as Rindrol and Saerasczsul).

I plundered what little the Malvurtarl trailsacks yielded, and Harshnag went on a brief hunting foray that yielded the carcasses of half a dozen wolves the frost giant termed “overbold,” that he gutted, skinned, and cooked on the fire with swift, deft skill and with the aid of three dead trees he’d felled along the edge of Turlang’s Wood and brought back with him as fuel.

As the flames roared and then died into coals, my newfound friend shifted the opened and splayed wolf carcasses over the heat and talked of giants (at first, he was as taciturn as his “grim” nickname suggested, but when he realized he was in the presence of someone who wanted to hear him out, and wasn’t just waiting for him to stop talking so they could speak, he opened up—and I have no good cause to think him anything less than candid).



I Befriend A Giant: Of Traditional Giantkind

Just as humans now dominate much of Toril, through sheer numbers

and our collective industry (“busy-ness” was the term Harshnag used), so too did giants once rule most of the world—certainly, almost all of the landmass known as Faerûn—in empires in which goblin and even elves were subjects or even slaves, or were firmly kept to specific territories, as a human gardener prunes and trains thick plantings in a vast garden (or so Harshnag put it).

All of that “Great Age” for giantkind ended, the frost giant told me, when their wars with the dragons began. Dragons, it seemed, kept aloof, ignoring the giants, but preyed at will upon herds of rothé and elk and other hoofed edibles the giants founded and tended, and at length the giants decided that hunting down and exterminating dragons was not only desirable, dragonslaying “won glory” for any giant doing so.

That, Harshnag told me, proved to be “our darkest mistake,” for giants and dragons fought bitter wars that nigh-destroyed both (there is still bitter enmity between them.), and the weakened giant empires were doomed. Today, the once-mighty giant realms have fallen, and giant progress and innovation and “clearthinking society” with them; giants now dwell in isolated, scattered clans, the rivalries and divisions among them grown “deep and tall.”

Such rivalries are innate to giantkind, for all giants hew to a caste system, “the ordning,” in which every individual giant, all over Toril, is ranked (storm giants on top, all of them ranked against each other), then cloud giants, followed by fire giants, frost, stone, hill, and then the “giant kin” such as fomorians, ettins, and ogres.

Each giant race values different combinations of personal skills and qualities to establish their rankings—fire giants, for example, prize skill in crafting things (forgework) and martial prowess (leadership and battlefield success) above other qualities, whereas cloud giants see themselves as master manipulators of lesser giantkind, using those they can command or sway through manipulation to reorder the world. Cloud giants enjoy status among the ranks of their fellows based on their mastery of manipulation and besting of other cloud giants, and in the wealth they amass and how they display it.

To excel in the skills and qualities
prized by the giant race a given

giant belongs to, is the driving purpose of an adult giant's life. Rank within a giant race bows to racial standing (a chieftain among the frost giants is ranked below the lowliest fire giant), but besting a giant of a "superior" race wins much advancement in status among your fellows—with one exception: cloud giants universally regard storm giants as addled "dreamers" and consider themselves the rightful and true foremost race of giantkind, so besting or deceiving a storm giant merely confirms that one is a true cloud giant, not that one is a better cloud giant than the next cloud giant.



All lesser giants compete and strive throughout their lives, but storm giants stand aloof and apart, devoting their lives to contemplation, not honing their status and standing. Most live in seclusion, striving to see ever more clearly what lies ahead, and the will of the god Annam, who turned away from giantkind so long ago and whose favor wise giants seek to win again. "Foretell, see more clearly, and so know the world better."

Harshnag is of the blue-skinned, hardy, coldlands-dwelling frost giants, several rungs below storm giants in the ordning. His kind value brute strength and fierceness above all else, and their lives are centered on careers of raiding and pillaging.

Harshnag himself is nigh an outcast among frost giants, for although he lives to act, as any frost giant does, he also values humans and their society—including their laws, customs, and commonly-won and held peace. Harshnag lived for years among humans in the city of Waterdeep, and though he now wanders the North, he forsakes not the company of humankind. Most of his kin prefer to smash and despoil in their raids. Whereas most frost giants festoon themselves with the severed heads of their foes and other grisly battle trophies, and are proud of their battle-scars, Harshnag collects friendships, and

setting wrongs right, and protecting crafters and innovators (for as he puts it, “Slaughter a farm family, and where are their crops to be taken in next year’s raids? Kill a smith, and his forge falls cold. There is a tendency among many giants, my own kind included, to see the bounty of the world as endless—kill a smith, another will seize his smithy and be there to be slain in turn at your next raid—but I see this view as mistaken, and foolish, and wasteful. A good reaver is also a gardener or farmer, tending and encouraging what he later intends to reap, so that what is reaped shall be as abundant and high of quality as possible”).

“Storm and stone giants are the most ponderous of giants, and are the least cut-and-thrust pragmatic, of all giantkind,” Harshnag told me. “I once took the time to sit and talk for days, just as you are talking with me, with a stone giant whom I can only think believed that enlightening me as to his views would be a good thing. He told me that stone giants take the long view, and that this is not patience; it is seeing consequences and cycles and the ongoing changes in the world that are not the overnight, blink-of-an-eye concerns that so grip and govern humankind.

I Befriend A Giant: Upheaval

Or rather, all of what Harshnag told me of the ordning and giant views and doings were how things *were* “from the beginning of time, in the mists before the dawn, when first we Annamar—we giants—came to this world.”

Now, things are changing.

It seems something has happened (signs from Annam, perhaps?) that have plunged everything into chaos. Giants are erupting in violence everywhere (the North, all across Faerûn, in particular, for that is where they are most numerous, and encounter the least numerous and strong resistance from “lesser races”; in more southerly regions of Toril, giants tend to hold sway



most in the largest, tallest mountain ranges, and raid down out of them, or make open war within them).

Oddly, a seer in Waterdeep caused a one-day sensation—not long after the open strife among the Lords of Waterdeep that saw violence in the council chamber of the Lords within the Palace itself—when he surfaced from a dream to proclaim, “Ostoria shall rise again!” Of old, Ostoria was the name of the greatest giant empire.

Harshnag believes giants who maraud beyond their racial habits (that is, beyond the club-prey foragings of hill giants, or the pillaging raids of frost giants) are seeking to impress the gods with their achievements and so win higher standing in a new ordning. Which would argue that any human who helps a giant do impressive deeds would be a valued ally. Or perhaps someone to be destroyed so such achievements would be the giant’s alone, and not partly the work of a lesser ally.

So it follows . . . don’t seem formidable to a giant, or he’ll see you as someone to be slain to better his standing in the eyes of the gods and fellow giants. Seem small and puny and weak, and your worth as a vanquished foe is little or nothing; you are beneath him, and to fight you is to lessen his standing in the ordning.

And provide ready food and drink: whole roast beasts and plentiful rivers of strong throatslake. Harshnag added, “And if you seek to poison a giant, *don’t*. What is deadly to a human may only make a giant burn or itch—and what could kill an entire human town may not be enough to take down one giant.”

This may or may not be true, but I leave experimentations to others. Though I warned the frost giant looming over my campfire, “Some humans will try, you know. Humans will be humans.”

He nodded, but muttered only, “Strength of Stronmaus,” which I gather is a curse among frost giants.

I also gathered that all sorts of giants do lots of cursing, these days.

And for now, that’s all from your helpful scribe, Volothamp Geddarm. I hope to learn more about giants—and their magic, in particular—but won’t delay publication of my [guide to monsters](#) to

include it. I have a hunch that the learning will be neither swift nor easy!

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A GIANT-SIZED ADVENTURE



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100 Dungeon Master Tips

By Mike Shea

Dungeons & Dragons isn't like other tabletop games. D&D has a fixed set of rules but Dungeon Masters quickly learn that the things that make D&D great go well beyond the game's rules. Dungeons & Dragons is built on the limitless imaginations of the DM and the players and that's what keeps people coming back and playing the game for decades.

As a Dungeon Master, experience on its own isn't enough to continually improve, and excellent Dungeon Mastering can be a difficult skill to learn. In these glorious days of the internet, we have fantastic examples to learn from, such as Chris Perkins's Acquisitions Incorporated and Matt Mercer's Critical Role videos. Sure, we can learn a lot when we watch other DMs, but sometimes the sheer amount of ideas can be overwhelming.

So we're going to take a different approach. What if we broke useful DMing tips down into a list, with each item representing one idea to help run a better D&D game and improve your DM's skills? Now, instead of trying to capture the best examples and advice all at once, we can focus on one piece at a time, considering it carefully, and then

give it a try before we move on to the next idea.

Using This List

About 20 minutes before you run your next D&D game, roll 1d100 (or percentile dice) and take a look at the tip you roll. Think about how you might incorporate it into your next game. Think about whether it makes sense for your game or, if it does not, why not? If you hate the tip, roll again and see what the next one is.

If the result is a tip you can incorporate into your game, think about how you can use it and jot down some notes on a 3×5 card. When you have a moment during your game, review the card to see if you've had a chance to use it or can think of a time coming up when you can.

You can, of course, read through all of these tips at once but that's not likely to be very helpful. No one can absorb 100 tips, remember them, and then use them in play. Instead, think of each tip as the fortune in a fortune cookie or the latest page in a "DM Tip of the Day" calendar. Reading through all of them might be interesting but probably not that helpful.

Above all, as you read a tip, take a moment to think about how it might make your game more fun and how it might help you move your DMing skills forward, even if it's only by a small step.

Now let's roll 1d100 and see what comes up!



01

Randomly choose a character to be the focus for the night's adventure. How can you make that character feel like a real hero?

02

Don't shy away from letting the characters split up. Give each separate group their own little scene.

03

Who are the three main threats in your adventure? What plots are they undertaking right now?

04

Ask players to “describe their killing blow” to tap into their creative brains instead of just focusing on the numbers.

05

Add a new element to the adventure that is entirely yours. Add a villain, a quest, an NPC, or a piece of background material that you personally love.

06

Two big tough monsters acting in concert are always a powerful threat for your characters. A single powerful monster might be defeated quite quickly.

07

Spend a few minutes thinking about the strengths of each of the characters and build interesting situations that help them show off those abilities.

08

Players love to shatter or short-circuit what might have seemed like a tough encounter. Let them enjoy circumventing it but change up the tactics for future encounters.

09

Let characters do crazy and awesome things. Tie their successes or failures to skill checks instead of just saying “no”.

10

Design exploration, interaction, and combat encounters in a way that showcases the characters or their skills. Cut encounters that showcase no one.



11 It's always better to end a game early, than to end a game late. If time is short, call the game at an opportune moment and let everyone enjoy the anticipation of the next session.

12

Spend a few minutes studying the backgrounds and motivations of the characters. Incorporate hooks into your game based on these backgrounds and motivations.

13

Spend some time looking over the random tables of the Dungeon Master's Guide to inspire some wild ideas. Pick one table to use in your next game.

14

Embrace the creative approaches your players find to get around obstacles and challenges. Make deals, add skill checks, and use advantage and disadvantage to tweak difficulties.

15

Each monster, even a single wolf within a pack, will have its own interesting and distinguishing features. When the characters attack this monster, ask the player to describe a unique characteristic of that foe.

16

"I will kill you all" isn't a very interesting interaction with a villain. "I killed your uncle, you know," will grab way more attention.

17

Take notes on the interests, backgrounds, approaches, and motivations of the characters during the game. Use them as adventure seeds in your next game.

18

Before you begin adding or modifying your own rules, try running the rules as written to get a strong feel for them. Ask yourself if a particular house rule would really make the game more fun.

19

Give players an idea of the background, themes, and style of your game so they can build their characters around it. Is it combat focused? Is it a mystery? Is it focused on court intrigue? Let them

know what you're thinking.

20

Roll dice in the open to let the winds of chaos move your story in unpredictable directions.



21

Write a strong start to your next game that throws characters right into the action. Start with a battle or a tough decision right off the bat.

22

Write down a list of five interesting scenes you think may occur in your next game.

23

Pay attention to quiet players and ensure they get their time in the spotlight.

24

What interesting magic item will your group find in your next session? What is the history of that magic item?

25

Describe and enjoy the thrashing of paralyzed or incapacitated monsters instead of stewing about how easily they were defeated.

26

Keep your primary storyline simple but wrap it in all sorts of deep complications.

27

Even for combat-heavy game sessions, insert interesting pieces of history, rumors, or secrets that the characters can learn.

28

Find opportunities to bring back previously encountered NPCs and

villains. Reward players who kept track of and remember these old foes.

29

Spend the time to read over the stat blocks of the monsters you plan to run. Study their spells and abilities and review them again just before you enter combat.

30

Not all players enjoy the explosive creativity of storytelling. Let each player play the game the way they most enjoy.

Your Own Tips

These 100 tips are just an example set. You likely have your own tips or can generate your own from games you've run, games you've played in, or games you've watched. What are your own favorite tips? Consider writing them down, passing them to friends, or sharing them with the D&D community on various message forums, on Facebook, or on Twitter using the #DMtips hashtag.



31

Add in a shady dealer with a random limited assortment of expensive magical items to rid characters of their excess gold.

32

Describe histories and storylines in small slices discovered by the characters as they explore the world around them.

33

Spend some time memorizing the names, classes, and races of the characters in your game.

34

Learn your players' birthdays and celebrate them with an adventure focused on their character's goals. Who is the next player with a

birthday coming up?

35

Improvise unique monsters by “reskinning” or wrapping their description around a stat block from a similar monster in the *Monster Manual*.

36

Monster hit points, as written, are only the average. Increase or decrease hit points within the hit die range to vary the challenge

37

Even something as simple as a quick sketch can help players understand the nuances of a combat encounter.

38

Improvise occasional silly moments in your game like an orc walking into a room with a big chef hat and a frilly apron that says “*Faerun’s Greatest Cook*”. What if that apron’s boast is true?

39

Mix two traps together to turn a standard trapped hallway into a complicated deathtrap.

40

Keep track of time and pacing of your game with an alarm or stopwatch if needed. Expect each major scene to take up to 45 minutes to an hour.



41

Ask your players to fill in details of a location or an NPC. Offload some of the cognitive creative burden to your players.

42

Make your story relevant to the characters by tying some of the story’s background and mysteries to skill checks the characters can roll and learn from.

43

End your game just before a fight to keep the tension high and keep them really interested in coming back.

44

D&D is a game with asymmetric power curves. Don't expect every battle to go smoothly one way or the other. Enjoy the unexpected

45

Players love loot. Spend time picking out the right loot to reward them in the next session and over your entire campaign

46

Remind players to let you know when they feel like another player deserves inspiration for a cool deed.

47

Player-described travel montages are a great way to let the whole table build an interesting story as the characters travel from point A to point B. Ask them to describe a challenge they faced and how another character helped them overcome it.

48

If your adventure had a sensationalist newspaper headline, how would it read?

49

Build interesting environments and complicated situations. Enjoy watching the characters navigate them in unexpected ways.

50

Build fantastic locations with scale. Describe mile-high waterfalls, hundred-story ziggurats, enormous statues of dead gods, and cyclopean fifty-foot-high doors.



51

If you decide to end a battle early, do it behind the screen by reducing monster hit points to 1. Don't let the players KNOW you're ending it

early. Let them enjoy the quick conclusion.

52

Every magic item has a unique and interesting history. Where did that +1 battleaxe come from?

53

Name every villain the characters face.

54

Read or re-read a section of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* that catches your interest. There's a ton of great material for your game in this book.

55

Use madness rules from the *Dungeon Master's Guide* when the characters come upon something truly horrific.

56

Spread out monsters into multiple waves for big, dynamic, epic and memorable battles.

57

Describe three notable features of every room the characters enter.

58

Arm your major villains with interesting magical items.

59

What can a trap teach the characters about their environment, history, or foes?

60

Let the group arbitrate a ruling when the rules aren't clear.

Above All, Do No Harm

You might consider these tips and realize that they're not for you. Everyone has their own DMing style and this advice might not fit into it. Still, consider what they can teach you anyway. If your own DMing style remains strong, these tips, even if they don't fit within it, can help you understand why your style is as strong as it is.



61

First and foremost, be fans of the characters (thanks *Dungeon World!*).

62

Give monsters an interesting array of weaponry. They don't all fight with the same short sword.

63

Describe profound hits, misses, and close calls with in-game descriptions but keep it fast and brief.

64

Build custom magic items by adding a once-per-day casting of an interesting spell relevant to the item's origin.

65

Choose a fair and experienced player to be the table's official rules lawyer to take on the burden of looking up rules and arbitrating edge cases.

66

Action is the name of the game. Give the characters something to do instead of reading pages of background narrative.

67

Create NPCs meaningful to the characters—uncles, brothers, sisters, daughters, war buddies, etc.

68

Ask your players what they enjoyed most about the game. Really listen to their answers without judgment.

69

NPCs, like all good characters, act true to their character rather than to a defined script. Think of them as a real people not just a collection of stats

70

Characters are the stars of the game. Don't let NPCs overshadow their accomplishments or trivialize their challenges.



71

Celebrate the players' powerful attacks and critical hits. You're all on the same side!

72

Even the biggest baddest villain will likely have a couple of tough bodyguards. No smart villain stands alone. Embrace the power of the henchmen, they may have compelling stories of their own.

73

If players change direction when following a series of quests, let them. Don't force them down one straight path.

74

Monsters are just as capable at using the environment around them as characters. Let them hurl boulders, tip braziers, or fire ballistae.

75

Foreshadow an interesting enemy through fearful descriptions from defeated monsters, strange cryptic notes, prophetic dreams, or shadows just over the horizon.

76

Allow for unexpected outcomes in combat. Don't force "all victory" or "all defeat" as the only options. What is the likely goal of the scene? When is that goal achieved?

77

Don't force a scene to be one of interaction, exploration, or combat. Any scene might go in any direction.

78

Give magic items memorable names.

79

Use side-based “around the table” initiative for smaller battles you want to run quickly.

80

Keep a stack of 3×5 cards on hand. They’re perfect for secret notes, initiative cards, quick monster stat blocks, or temporary status conditions.

Continual Improvement

If we want to get better as Dungeon Masters, we have to do more than just run games. We can study D&D games. We can discuss D&D games. We can keep our eyes, ears, and mind open to learn how other people run their own D&D games. These days we can absorb lifetimes of experience running D&D games by watching games as they’re played or reading about the experiences of others. We have access to thousands of Dungeon Masters and can learn from every one of them, even the bad ones. Above all, we seek to learn. And the best way to learn is one small tip at a time!



81

Does a player have a question about part of the game world? Ask them the same question and incorporate their idea back into the world.

82

Add seasons and holidays into your game to keep the feeling of life strong in the world.

83

Add festivals, fairs, and special events to towns recently entered by the characters. Show them as living breathing places.

84

Use characters from your favorite books, movies, or TV shows as

archetypes for the NPCs in your game.

85

Ask players to describe the previous session to refresh themselves and show you what they focused on.

86

Find and show off interesting artwork you found on the internet when describing fantastic locations.

87

Dead or abandoned characters can make great hooks for future game sessions. Who got left behind?

88

Keep a set of maps from old adventures on hand in case your characters take an unexpected turn into a dungeon beneath an old rotted tree stump.

89

Every villain thinks they're a hero. What drives your villains to do what they do?

90

Players often describe interesting approaches or traits of their characters during the game. Write them down and reference them often.



91

Target characters by rolling randomly to avoid unconscious biases. That said, intelligent monsters won't shy from a good tactic.

92

Think about what each style of play your players enjoy. Give them each a scene built on their interests.

93

Are your players spending too much time on their smartphones? Ask

them questions or have them roll skill checks to reveal clues that draw their character back into the game.

94

Pay attention to player body language. What brings them to the edge of their seat? What has them leaning back with arms crossed and eyes narrowed?

95

Mix exploration, combat, and interaction together into a single wild three-ringed-circus of a scene.

96

Even dead NPCs might have interesting histories the characters discover over the course of an adventure.

97

If a scene begins to drag, move the story forward. Skip transitions and jump right to the next most interesting part.

98

Build combat encounters vertically. There's nothing like a fight on the edge of a cliff or under a roaring waterfall.

99

Use "advantage" and "disadvantage" as your motivators for creative improvised ideas from your players.

100

The number one rule to good Dungeon Mastering? Relax and have fun.

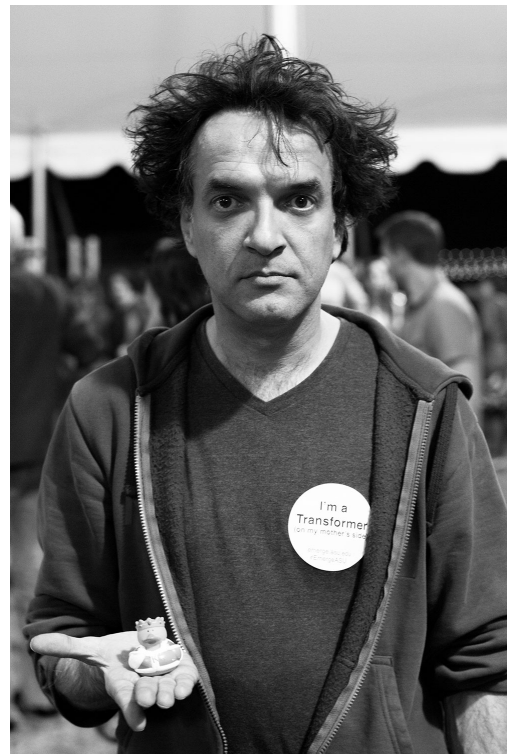
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She Kills Monsters

Qui Nguyen's stage play is a combination of madcap comedy and heartbreaking coming-of-age drama, all told inside a D&D module from the '90s. Matt Chapman spoke to Lance Gharavi, the director of a new production at Arizona State University.

Today's geek culture has come a long way from the era that depicted the scrawny, glasses-wearing, inhaler-wielding nerd.. Didn't we always gather together to attend a PAX event or play our favorite tabletop games? Sadly, even a glance back at recent history uncovers some uncomfortable gender stereotypes.



“It was unusual to see female characters portrayed as part of geek culture from the ’90s and I think it’s one of the things that made this stage play stand out,” says Lance Gharavi, professor in the School of Film, Dance and Theatre at Arizona State University. He has directed a production of Qui Nguyen’s play, *She Kills Monsters*, which sees a young teacher find a homebrew D&D adventure while clearing out her dead sister’s things, introducing her to that world.

“The Oscars got hit really hard a year ago about how the Best Picture nominations didn’t include any movies written by women or about women. So we’re still dealing with these issues,” says Gharavi. “But I think gaming culture and geek culture, while there are still a lot of struggles, has come a long way. In the ’90s in particular it was very male dominated That was really important for the way we approached the production. Dungeons & Dragons is for everybody, not just young white men. It’s a game where everybody can live out their fantasy, whatever or whoever they may be.”



(Select to view)

Gharavi admits he jumped at the chance to direct the play himself. Not only was he a fan of D&D from his childhood, but his earliest experiences were of playing with strong, smart women, who introduced him to the game.

“One of the things I liked about the script was that it was a woman’s story. Not just a story with a strong female protagonist, but a story about the relationship between two women, sisters,” he shares.

“There are a lot of clichés about gaming culture, nerd culture and fantasy and science fiction, and we’ve seen a lot of controversies in that regard just in the past few years. I think this play makes a major statement without preaching or saying, ‘We’re sending a political message here!’ *She Kills Monsters* doesn’t just pass the **Bechdel Test**, it shatters it.”

What drew you to this play?

One of my jobs at the university is that I’m the assistant director of the theatre, which makes me the artistic director of the MainStage theatre season. So I choose the season of plays we’re going to do. Someone sent me a proposal for *She Kills Monsters* and I read it and immediately it appealed to me because I’m a Dungeons & Dragons geek from way back. I also just thought it was a really fun script that

our students and our audiences would really enjoy. In trying to figure out who should direct this, I thought of myself. I have a history with this game and I understand the culture, so I thought I could bring something to it.

The dead sister only appears as a character in the game. But there are some big reveals about her life. Is that tough when you're directing, to have her be this fantasy character? Or is that easier in a way?

I don't know about easier. Part of the conceit of the play is that everything that's coming out of the mouth of the younger sister Tilly on stage has got to be understood as being interpreted by the character of the Dungeon Master. So there's one scene in particular where this really comes to the fore where Agnes, the protagonist, and her deceased sister Tilly are having a very intimate conversation where Agnes has discovered that Tilly was picked on in high school. So they're trying to have this very deep emotional conversation and then that conversation breaks and the Dungeon Master says, 'Hey, I'm having a really hard time, I'm not really comfortable doing this. I'm all for roleplaying but this is deeper than I usually get.' So in a way the Dungeon Master becomes almost a spiritualist medium trying to be a conduit between the dead and the living. To me it plays into the gender dynamics of the play as well. All of those conversations are understood as mediated through the DM, who is a male character. So that does complicate matters a little bit.



(Select to view)

Have you modified the play or are you using the author's original script?

There's a version of the script that is actually cleaned up for high school students. The play is very popular with young people because many of the characters high school age. But Qui Ngyyen created a version specifically for high school students that cuts out the profanity and a lot of the sex stuff. But we did the full version, which the language at times can get a little rough and the sexuality is very frank. And that's part of what makes it so much fun. We adjusted a few things, not changing the script so much, but I added a scene where we get a glimpse into the lives of the characters. It was a scene with the characters miming what they do in their lives. But we did the full length version of the play.



(Select to view)

How does your production handle the mix of comedy, stage fights and special effects?

There is a lot of fighting in the show. I describe the play as being like a piece of musical theatre where instead of having the characters breaking out into song every few minutes, the characters kill things. The fights are there in place of musical numbers and I treated them rather like that. One of my colleagues David Barker, who's a fight choreographer, came in to handle the stage combat for us. We spent

an enormous chunk of the rehearsal process carefully choreographing and rehearsing all the fights in the show, over and over and over again. For every performance, before the audience shows up to the theatre, we had what's known as fight call. In this the actors go through each bit of violence in the show. Just to do that took an hour every night.



(Select to view)

There's one fight that I call the big fight. It's a huge battle with 21 actors on stage, all fighting at the same time. Some of them are puppets but most of them are actors in costume. It was a very complicated bit of work. The play ends with Agnes the protagonist fighting Tiamat, the legendary Dungeons & Dragons monster. This puppet took 10 puppeteers to operate. The fight itself lasts four or five minutes. It's a beautiful, intense fight with these enormous dragon puppet heads with big glowing eyes. So it took a lot of effort, care, creativity and sweat on the parts of the actors to get all of these fights looking good and exciting.

Before we go into rehearsal we spend weeks and weeks with the designers talking about the look of the show, my discussion with David Barker the fight director about the feel of the fights. One of the things I decided early on is that I wanted the weapons to be outsized and larger than life, so they were the kind of weapons that could

never be wielded in real life as you often see in a lot of fantasy art. You get these characters with enormous battle axes that no real person could lift. So we decided to go with live-action roleplay style weapons, some of which we purchased and some of which we crafted ourselves. So the weapons weren't actual steel weapons, they were made from PVC and foam. What that allowed us to do... when you're fighting on stage with actual steel weapons, you have to be incredibly careful, because you could seriously injure or kill someone swinging a broadsword around. We still had to use immense caution with these LARPer weapons because it's still dangerous, but it allowed us to do things that we wouldn't otherwise be able to do in terms of the combat. And the combat was at once fantastical – for the most part you wouldn't mistake it for actual fighting – but because of the illusions you can create from stage combat and the commitment of the actors and the sound design, the fights were very impactful. We used a lot of Foley methods when a character gets hit or cut with a sword, you hear it. So it's very visceral and effective.



(Select to view)

Does the audience need any knowledge of D&D to enjoy the play? To judge by the audience's reaction, I would say absolutely no. We had people come to see the show again and again, repeated viewings of it, who didn't know anything about D&D. One of the most delightful things was that every night the audience started cheering in

the first few seconds, and was with it the whole time. The vast majority of that audience have never played D&D. Now for the real fans, they were enjoying it on a totally different level. They understand the culture and what's intriguing and fun about the game. But the show itself works for audiences regardless of whether you've played D&D.

It's set in the mid-'90s, not pre-internet but as he boasts in the play, '56Kbps'...

It's set in 1995 which is the year the first version of Internet Explorer came out. At this time computers didn't necessarily come packaged with internet capability. Web browsers were a new thing. So it is in many ways a nostalgia piece. We filled the show with '90s music and clothing and there are all kinds of '90s references in there. As I said in the director's notes, it was a time before **hanging Chads** and falling towers. But it wasn't a more innocent time. If you think back to the '90s it was a time of deep irony that I think we can still understand today. A few of my actors, in fact, were not born when this play takes place. They were born after 1995. For them it was a lot of fun because they love the music – this was two years after Kurt Cobain died. So it was a time of amazing music and really before geek culture took over the world. Dungeons & Dragons and comic books were still very much outside the cultural mainstream. So there's a sense that it was counter culture or forbidden at that time. This would have been during the second edition.

Do you have a favourite part of the play?

There's a scene in Orcus's lair. Steve enters, announcing himself as "The great mage Steve," and demanding Orcus give him the legendary "Staff of Suh." Orcus just hands it to him. "Here ya go, little man." Steve is thrilled by the easy victory. But then a trap door opens under his feet and he vanishes screaming into a pit. Every



(Select to view)

night, the audience just would just gasp, as though they couldn't believe what they just saw. Then they would erupt in laughter and applause. It's a pretty great moment of stage magic.



(Select to view)

It was great to see all the amazing young actresses just kicking serious ass in the fights in the show. The young woman who played Tilly, not yet 18 years old, came into auditions and said, 'I'm going to show you something.' She put on these metal kneepads, clicked on a boom box that started pumping out death metal, and proceeded to throw herself around the room doing falls and tumbles and fighting moves. It was amazing. Her name is Antoinette Martin-Hanson and she is truly a badass.

Listen to the Dragon Talk episode with Lance Gharavi and Antoinette Martin-Hanson to hear more about her crazy audition and how she approached playing this character.

LISTEN NOW

(Photos by Tim Trumble unless otherwise noted)



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The Best of the Dungeon Masters Guild



The **Dungeon Masters Guild** is the perfect platform for creating, sharing, and publishing your Dungeons & Dragons adventures. Since its launch, hundreds of DMs, players, and fans, have created new characters, monsters, spells, and locations, bringing a wealth of options and details to the Forgotten Realms setting.

But with so many fine choices, how do you know which ones to pick? *Dragon+* is here to help. Each issue, we'll shine a spotlight on some of the best content on the DMs Guild, and we'll speak to its creators to bring you tips for creating your own.

As a bonus, you'll be able to download the content for free with an exclusive access code available in *Dragon+*.

Our selections this month are *Battle for the Undercity*, a fifth edition

adventure designed for characters level 7 – 9, and *The Pugilist*, a street fighting character class with some swagger.

Battle for the Undercity is written by Monica Valentinelli, with rules and editing by Scott Holden, and can take place in the underground section of any major city in the Forgotten Realms. In the adventure, a party can explore an underground network of sinister sewers, forgotten crypts, and freshly dug passageways, fending off fearsome adversaries to rescue hostages.

The adventure is robust with up to three separate missions that can be played in three to four hours. You'll love the detailed map, distinctive locations, and brooding atmosphere. Lurking within the Undercity's dark tunnels are the fearsome Ten Legs Goblin Tribe and the merciless Crimson Coins Thieves' faction, as well an ancient terror that will chill the blood. There's also some impressive background and adventuring hooks, advice for customizing the adventure, and notes for adjusting missions to increase or decrease difficulty and length.

Meet Monica Valentinelli – creator of *Battle for the Undercity*

I played with some friends in college, but I've been more active playing D&D now that the fifth edition has come out.

What's your background? Have you always wanted to design D&D adventures?

I am a full-time writer, editor, and game designer and have been for some time. I co-edited and ran the Kickstarter for *Upside Down:*

Inverted Tropes in Storytelling which is an anthology that'll be published through Apex Book Company this Fall. I just released *Firefly: The Gorramn Shiniest Language Guide and Phrasebook in the 'Verse* back in April, and *Ghouls & Revenants* for *Vampire: The Masquerade 20th Anniversary Edition*. If you're curious about my



Monica Valentinelli

work, you should check out my [website](#).

Did any of your own personal adventuring feed into *Battle of the Undercity*?

Because I work on a lot of games either as a developer (*Firefly RPG*, *Hunter: The Vigil 2E*) or as a writer (*Mistborn RPG*, *Vampire: The Masquerade*), I tend to prefer scenarios that can be run in one-to-three sessions as opposed to a campaign.

I prefer to play short D&D adventures when I can, because I enjoy swooping down on goblins and other beasties to save the day with my gaming group. Parts of *Battle for the Undercity* did come out of those experiences, because I was thinking about what type of adventure I wanted to play, as opposed to what I wanted to run.



What's your favorite character or situation from Undercity? What's been your favorite part to design?

Answering this question feels as if I rolled a "1", because it feels almost impossible to choose just one element. The Ten Legs tribe was fun, because it was a new twist on the existing material, Goblins riding spiders, and I love those kinds of challenges. The Crimson Coins faction, on the other hand, I wrote with a sense of dread. I was worried the faction was a bit too dark. If I had to pick a favorite, though, I'd say the Ancient Revenant monster variant! I had to stop myself from writing fiction based on the idea, because the potential for a larger story arc literally exploded in my mind.

Has the DM's Guild been a good platform for you to get your ideas to a wider audience?

I think it's a great platform for folks who want to contribute to the rich fabric of Dungeons & Dragons, but I also feel there's a lot that can be done to get more out of the site. For myself, I do feel that it was beneficial and I'm curious to see what happens next.

Do you have any advice for people designing for the DM's Guild?

Big picture? First and foremost, don't undervalue your work. Free shouldn't be the default metric, especially if you're putting in a lot of hours writing, editing and playtesting. However, if you are charging, think about what value you're providing for fans like yourself. I feel that if you're going to charge a fee for your work, you can offer a professional-looking release pretty easily. At bare minimum, try to have a cover for it and a classy description.

If you're creating something all D&D fans can enjoy, start with a map, then, figure out which characters are active in different locations. I've offered three different factions thematically because I never expected fans to be drawn to any one in particular. They're all there for DMs to customize for the needs of their table.

What kind of DM or player are you?

I tend to play, more so than DM, because I run a lot of story-based games and D&D is a way to blow off some steam. I have a huge amount of fun with it because I can play the tank, so to speak, and introduce orcs to my axe. Right now, I'm playing around with a lot of different types of characters, because I want to see how they compare in battle. Though I do love a good story, and am drawn to them, I also like the fact that if I want to play a lighter adventure I can do that

with very little challenge.

What else are you working on?

I am working on something inspired by *Ravenloft*, but right now that's on the backburner until a few other time-sensitive projects are off my plate. I'm editing an anthology of short stories for *V20: Dark Ages*, am working on a new setting sourcebook for *Shadowrun*, and am developing the core book for *Hunter: The Vigil 2nd Edition* in addition to writing my own stuff and presenting at conventions like Gen Con. Once I get past these deadlines, I'll be diving back in to write something new!

To see more of Monica's work visit her web site, www.mlvwrites.com.

THE PUGILIST

“The dwarf smiles broadly and chuckles as the petty noble raises his hand to strike him for the impudent remark. Quick as a flash the dwarf shatters the bottle in his hand against the bar and puts it between himself and the noble. The noble flinches, stumbles backward, and runs away as the dwarf turns back to the bar to order another round.”

With nothing but their wits, will, and fists, pugilists lay it all on the table every time they're in for a scrap. No strangers to adversity, pugilists can dish it out, take a licking and still keep coming back for more. A pugilist's unbreakable spirit and talent for fisticuffs don't come from rigorous training or high-minded philosophies but are the hard won trophies of never backing down from a fight no matter the odds.

The Pugilist is written by Benjamin Huffman and is part of the **Sterling Vermin Co.'s** impressive set of custom character classes. This small but perfectly formed pamphlet focuses on D&D's street fighting men and women, and boasts impressive art

as well as some well-researched skills, class features, and a nicely balanced progression path. If you've ever yearned to play a prize fighter or street brawler who thinks with their fists, lives on their wits, and is afraid of no one, then *The Pugilist* is highly recommended. Put up your dukes ... seconds out ... round one!



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**TO FIGHT
GIANTS,
YOU NEED TO
BE GIANT**

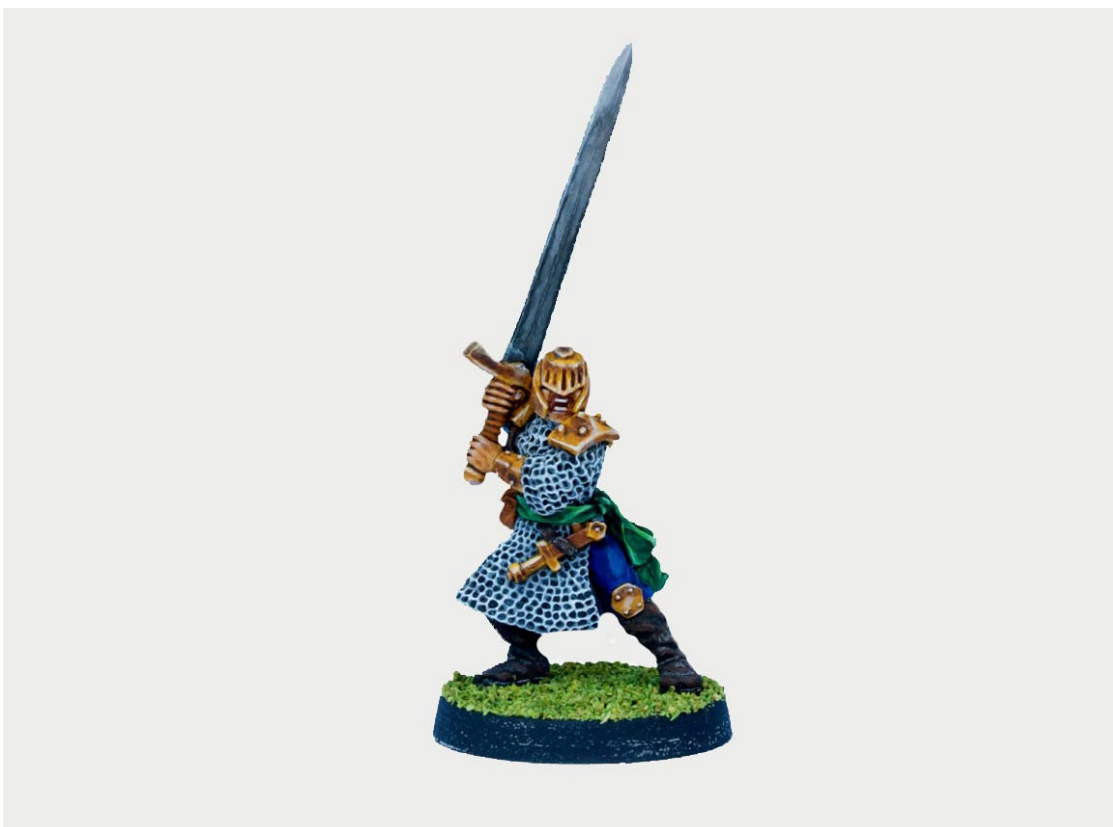
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MELTDOWN



The Tiny Origin of D&D

Shannon Appelcline

THE WARRING ORIGINS: 1957-1973

The path to Dungeons & Dragons wends through at least four different miniatures wargames of the late '60s and 'early '70s. They all have their origins in the slightly larger wargaming field, which included both board games and miniatures games. By the '60s the field was supported by numerous magazines and even an organization, the International Federation of Wargames (IFW) from 1967-1973. It was one of the IFW's founding members that would connect the wargaming and roleplaying fields: Gary Gygax. At the time, he primarily played board war games like *Gettysburg* (1958) and *Diplomacy* (1959), but miniatures soon entered the picture.

Gygax helped to host the IFW's debut convention in Pennsylvania

in 1967. It was a bit of a flop, and Gygax decided that he could do better on his own. The result was Gen Con I (1968). There, Gygax saw the first of the games that would lead to the roleplaying industry: *The Siege of Bodenber* (1967), a medieval wargame centered on a castle and related 40mm miniatures produced by Elastolin. This impressive castle and its miniature attackers and defenders apparently inspired Gygax, because he was soon buying “ancient and medieval miniatures” of his own.


Board-based wargames like *Diplomacy* could be played by mail, but miniature wargames required local opponents, so by the end of 1969, Gygax had founded a local club: the Lake Geneva Tactical Studies Association (LGTSA). Some of its core members, such as Rob Kuntz and Don Kaye, are well known for their contributions to TSR and to D&D. However, another may have been even more important: Jeff Perren.

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Page from Dragon, October 1976 (Select to view)

WARGAMING WORLD



As can be seen on these two hobgoblins, each figure is slightly different from any other; either in bits of uniform, weaponry or pose.



This orc illustrates the casting technique used throughout this line, where possible.



These are only four of the many orcs that will fill out the D&D line. Weaponry and positioning differences lend themselves well to realistic-looking mobs of orcs.



What dwarf-lover could resist these fierce-looking dwarves. Again, large numbers of different dwarves (there are more to come not shown) make for realistic, complete armies. Khazad-dum was never like this.

The biggest news for fantasy fanciers has to be the release, and impending release, of the EPT and D&D feature lines, respectively. LEGIONS OF THE PETAL THRONE, as the EPT line is titled, is produced by Bill Murray of OLD GEARDE. He's done a beautiful job on them, as the samples on the facing page show. There are 17 packs available now, with many more forthcoming before the line is completed. EPT enthusiasts are sure to take interest in them, and when the rules for EPT miniatures are done, more battles such as the one in this issue (The Temple of Chaos) will be possible. TSR has long range plans for painting guides to complement the rules.

The D&D figure line promises to be even bigger than that for EPT. Beautifully sculpted by David Hutchins of England, from drawings by Mini Roush and Dave Sutherland, the range is a fantasy gamer's dream come true.

They are just now going into production in this country, and a release date should be forthcoming very soon. (Watch these pages for it.) In the first batch released there will be approximately 90 different figures. They will be packed in sets of 5, with no figures duplicated in any set. (Command sets will be in 4's.)



These kobolds point up easily and nicely, making it easy and inexpensive to amass a horde.

We have seen about 50 of the figures so far, and without exception, they are excellent. The trick of casting the shield separate from the body (shown below) lends these figures to conversions quite well, as well as facilitating painting. The high quality of the metal assures the durability of them, while lending itself to bending easily.

Custom Cast has announced that all of the FANTASTIQUE (phase 1) line will be completed by Christmas. The personality set for the Hobbit (set 1987) is out, as well as the second set of DUNGEON! playing pieces. All of the CHIVALRY line that was stated in the catalog is now complete; the same on the THERMODYNAMIC range. Truly 'til the season to be jolly...



NH-1 Shear

NH-2 Sna



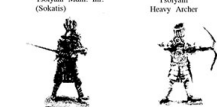
P-1

Priest of Hlry



T-6

T-3



T-4 Inf

Y-3

Legion of Red Devastation



Y-2

T-1

Yan Koryami Heavy Inf

Tsolyani General



Y-1

Yan Koryami Gen

FANTASY/SWORDS & SORCERY: RECOMMENDED READING From Gary Gyax

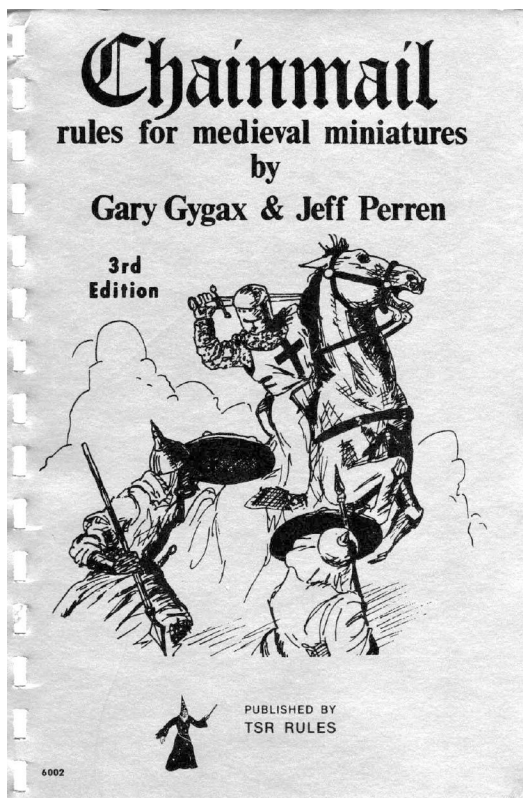
AUTHORS	SPECIFIC WORK
Anderson, Paul	Three Hearts and Three Lions
Blackwood, Algonon	
Brackett, Leigh	John Carter of Mars (etal)
Burnoughs, E.R.	Warrior of the Worlds End
Carter, Lin	Incomplete Enchanter
deCamp & Pratt	Castle of Iron (etal)
Farmer, P.J.	Gates of Creation (etal)
Fox, G.F.	Kother the Barbarian (etal)
Howard, R.E.	Conan the Conqueror (etal)
Lanter, Sterling	Hero's Journey
Leiber, Fritz	Swords of Lankmar (etal)
Lowcraft, H.P.	
Merritt, A.	Creep Shadow, Creep Moon Pool
	Face in the Abyss
	Dwellers in the Mirage (etal)
	Scaler of Souls
	Stormbringer
	Changling Earth
	The Hobbit
	Lord of the Rings (Trilogy)
	Eyes of Overworld
	The Dying Earth
	Jack of Shadows (etal)
	Lord of Light
	Nine Princes of Amber series

Pages from Dragon, December 1976 (Select to view)

Perren had a great collection of medieval Elastolin miniatures and had even developed a game system for their use. Gyax quickly seized upon it and began expanding the rules for use in various historic eras. However, the middle ages were now his main interest, so he also pushed for the creation of a new IFW Society focused on the time period: the Castle & Crusade Society was formed in early 1970 under the "rulership" of Rob Kuntz. It even had its own magazine, *The Domesday Book* (1970-1971).

The fifth issue of the *Domesday Book* (July 1970) was crucial to the future of D&D, because it contained that set of medieval miniatures rules by Jeff Perren, now expanded by Gary Gyax. It was called the "LG TSA Miniatures Rules". Gyax would expand them again in March 1971 as *Chainmail* (1971).

Chainmail wasn't Gary Gyax's only wargaming publication that year. He was also designing a game with a Minnesotan named Dave Arneson, who he'd met at Gen Con II (1969). Together they produced *Don't Give Up the Ship!* (1971), a naval miniatures wargame that might have



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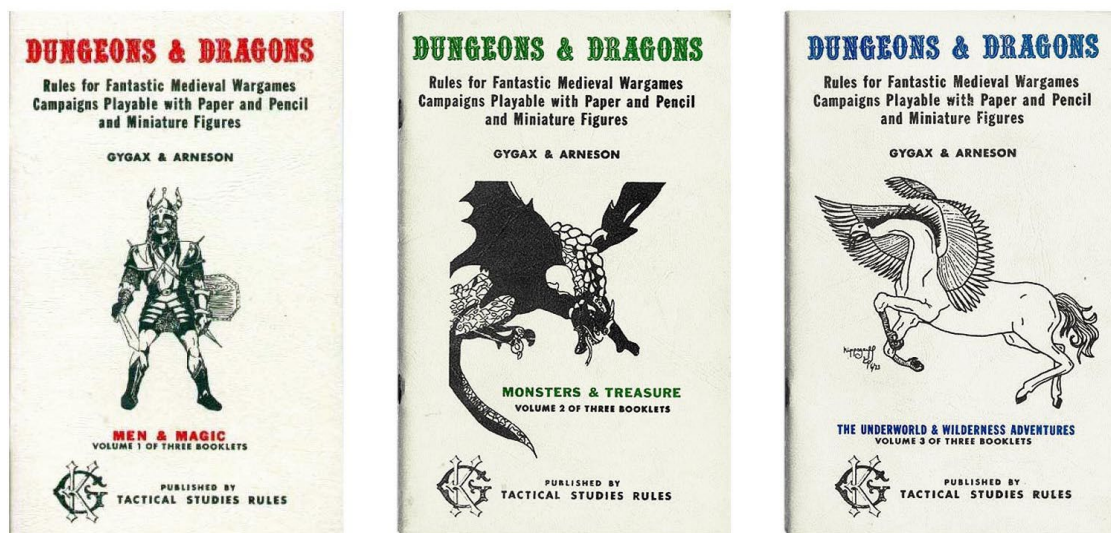
influenced D&D with its reference to “saving throws” and even a system of experience!

The final miniatures wargame that influenced the creation of D&D was Dave Wesely’s Braunstein game. These Braunsteins were intended to be Napoleonic miniatures games, but the players

(including Dave Arneson) were given the roles of individuals with distinct goals. They had so much fun in these roles that sometimes the wargaming was entirely ignored! After Wesely was called away to serve in real battles, Arneson decided to run his own Braunstein with a twist: he ran a medieval Braunstein, which he called Blackmoor.

Arneson used Perren and Gygax’s new *Chainmail* rules as the mechanical basis of the Blackmoor. When individual characters began adventuring through the dungeons of Castle Blackmoor using *Chainmail* rules, a new game was born.

THE EARLY DAYS: 1974-1982

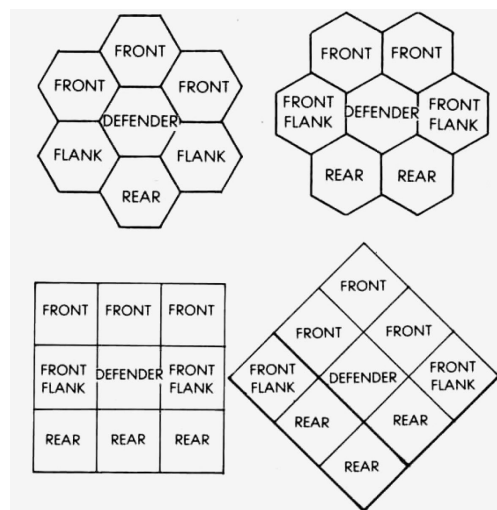


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When Original Dungeons & Dragons (OD&D) first appeared in 1974, it was really a supplement to *Chainmail*. Though it included an “alternative combat system”, it was clear that the *Chainmail* miniatures rules were the preferred resolution system. That only changed with *OD&D Supplement I: Greyhawk* (1975), which expanded the alternative combat system into a more mature form. Miniatures nonetheless remained important to the OD&D game: the fifth OD&D supplement, *Swords & Spells* (1976), was a new mass-combat system for OD&D.

A year later Advanced Dungeons & Dragons (AD&D) (1977-1979) began to revise OD&D by codifying the game system. The rules still talked about using miniature figures, and long maintained miniature scaling, telling players that 1” = 10’ in a dungeon or 10 yards in the wilderness. However, with the advent of AD&D, miniatures were becoming less integral to the game.

They were still important enough to support tie-in miniatures sales. TSR licensed two different miniatures creators in this time period. Minifigs of England (1977) was the first manufacturer of official D&D miniatures. Their figures were crudely manufactured, but included unique *D&D* monsters like gnolls and



Grids from the first DM Guide, 1980
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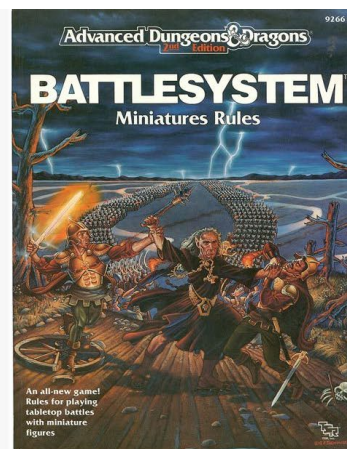
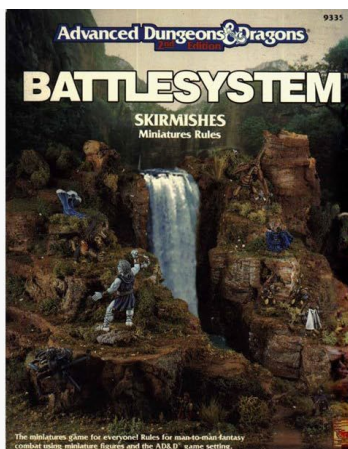
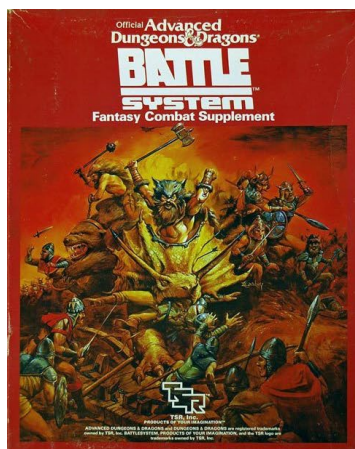
demons, including Demogorgon and Orcus! They also produced an official *World of Greyhawk* line.

Grenadier followed (1980) and

produced higher quality miniatures, including boxed sets highlighting many of D&D's classes.

When Grenadier's license ended in 1982, it wasn't because miniatures were being phased out, but because bigger things were afoot. . .

A NEW BATTLESYSTEM: 1983-1998



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In 1982, TSR was contemplating a new focus on miniatures. This began when they hired Duke Seifried, a classic miniatures maker who got into the business making "Der Kriegspielers" Napoleonic figures way back in 1971, formed his own Custom Cast in 1972, then manufactured the first US-made line of 25mm fantasy figures in 1974. He was one of the most important people in the early

miniatures industry.

When Seifried came to TSR, he gave them the ability to manufacture their own miniatures. TSR announced this plan in January 1983, but unfortunately it ran straight into the company's financial problems at the time. Seifried was laid off a few months later, though the miniatures work continued, with boxed sets and blister packs of official TSR fantasy miniatures appearing in 1983 and 1984. Many focused on AD&D's official classes, while others depicted original D&D monsters like aarakocra and ropers.



In 1985, TSR supplemented their miniatures manufacture with a new AD&D supplement that supported mass combat: *Battlesystem* (1985). It was a reflection of what Games Workshop was then doing in the UK: they set up Citadel Miniatures and then supported the sale of their miniatures with *Warhammer Fantasy Battle* (1983). By 1985,

this model was already proving successful.



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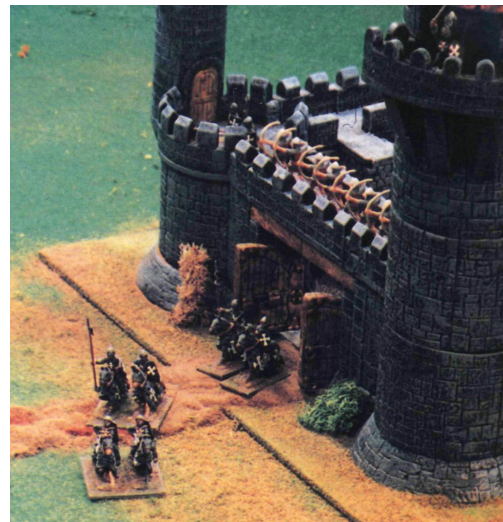
Unfortunately, TSR's financial problems kept them from being able to successfully leverage their miniatures business in the same way. This may be why they packaged *Battlesystem* with cardboard counters that could be used as alternatives to miniatures. TSR was in fact abruptly halting their short-lived miniatures manufacture, though they'd continue to support their new *Battlesystem* through the *Dragonlance* adventures (1984-1986) and the *Bloodstone Pass* series (1985-1988).

Citadel became the licensed producer of D&D miniatures in 1985 and 1986, but then TSR moved over to Ral Partha, who would hold the license for D&D miniatures past TSR's demise in 1997. They would produce numerous figures during that decade, including miniatures for TSR settings like *Birthright*, *Dark Sun*, *Dragonlance*, *Forgotten Realms*, *Planescape*, and *Ravenloft*.

Meanwhile, TSR released a streamlined second edition of *Battlesystem*, now called *Battlesystem Miniatures Rules* (1989). Ral Partha produced a miniatures line for the new mass-combat game, creating the connection between the game system and the miniatures that TSR had been unable to in 1985.

Battlesystem was supported for a few more years. This included the man-to-man *Battlesystem Skirmish* (1991) system, which focused on miniatures combat at a 1:1 scale. Around the same time, TSR also released the *Dark Sun* setting (1991), which was intended to be

a “war world” where miniatures warfare and fantasy adventure could freely mix.



(Select to view)

However, that was largely the end of TSR’s experimentation with miniatures systems. There was one resurgence of note: *Player’s Option: Combat & Tactics* (1995) introduced a new, more tactical combat system for AD&D that placed increased emphasis on using miniatures and battle mats to determine spatial positioning. It was a divergence from the way AD&D was played during the AD&D 2e era (1989-2000), but it would be a strong influence on D&D 3e (2000).

THE WIZARDS OF THE COAST REBIRTH: 1999-Present

A few years after purchasing D&D, Wizards of the Coast began to produce their own miniatures, starting with Silver Anniversary line (1999). A D&D 3e line (2000) then coincided with the new edition of D&D (2000), which included tactical combat that could be modeled with miniatures. However, Wizards’ big push into miniatures came with the release of the *Dungeons & Dragons Chainmail Miniatures Game* (2002), a new 1:1 scale skirmish game that allowed players to fight fantasy wars with a simplified version of the d20 rules. Official miniatures followed.



Chainmail was very soon replaced with the *Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures Game* (2003), which simplified and streamlined the earlier game system. A bigger change came with the tie-in miniatures. For the first time ever, *D&D*'s official miniatures moved from metal to plastic, and were also sold in randomized collectible packs. The new game's miniatures depicted many classic *D&D* monsters, and so were usable with *D&D* itself. *D&D*'s *Miniatures Handbook* (2003) offered even more integration advice.

For the next eight years, the *D&D Miniatures Game* was published as a parallel game to *D&D*. Numerous miniatures sets were released, from *Harbinger* (2003) to *Desert of Desolation* (2007), then the game made a jump to *D&D* 4e (2008) rules with *Dungeons of Dread* (2008). Some of the most impressive miniatures in this era were the *Icons*, beginning with the *Gargantuan Black Dragon* (2006).

Support for the gaming side of the miniatures ended in 2008, then the line was cancelled entirely in 2011. This was in part because Wizards was experimenting with new miniatures-focused games. The first were the *D&D Adventure*



System games, starting with the *Castle Ravenloft Board Game*

(2010). These games were cooperative dungeon crawls, not competitive wars, but they contained many pounds of plastic miniatures. The *Adventure Systems* were followed by *Dungeon Command* (2012-2013). This non-collectible skirmish game allowed players to fight against each other with warbands, while also maintaining some continuity with the *Adventure System* games.



Meanwhile, gaming accessory creator Gale Force Nine received a license to publish D&D accessories in early 2010. Their early production consisted of token sets, game mats, and world maps, but in 2012 they announced something new: the “Collector’s Series” of unpainted resin miniatures. These non-randomized miniatures highlighted iconic elements of the D&D game. The earliest releases included Lolth, Drow, a beholder, and a purple worm. More recently the line has featured themed sets related to classic modules, including *The Scourge of Suderham* (2013) and *Tomb of Horrors* (2013), as well as minis for modern adventures such as their *Elemental Evil* sets (2015) and *Curse of Strahd* (2016).

Wizards picked up another miniatures licensee in early 2014 when they let WizKids take over their own miniature production. WizKids has followed closely in the footsteps of Wizards' lines, releasing randomized *Icons of the Realms* miniatures for many of D&D's adventure events, beginning with *Tyranny of Dragons* (2014). They've also published the newest *Adventure System* game, *The Temple of Elemental Evil* (2015). However, they're creating new miniatures games too, such as the *D&D Attack Wing* (2014) air warfare game.

It's been over 40 years since *D&D* sprang forth from the tiny world of miniatures, but miniatures continue to be an important part of the *D&D* game to this very day and to my mind, one of its most fascinating aspects!

SOURCES & THANKS

Jon Peterson's *Playing at the World* (2012) is the definitive source on the wargaming origins of D&D and was used as a major reference for the first section of this article. Michael Witwer's *Empire of Imagination* (2015) also reveals some of Gary Gygax's early interactions with gaming, albeit in dramatized form. For the history of D&D's miniatures before plastic took over, the excellent website DnDLead.com was the major reference; it's full of plentiful pictures and even scans of catalogs, some of which were used in this article, with permission. Other research came from the work done on the author's own series of *Designers & Dragons* history books and from similar history work done for the D&D Classics releases at DMsGuild.com.

BACK TO TOP



Power Leveling in Neverwinter:

10 Essential tips, tricks, and tactics

From callow level one newbie, to epic Neverwinter-saving hero in no time! We've compiled the following 10 essential tips, tricks, and tactics on how to level up in Neverwinter and make your character levels soar!

Start playing Neverwinter today on PC, Xbox One, and soon on PS4.

[Learn More](#)

1) Decide on your play style



(Select to view)

Decide early on how you want to play the game, Neverwinter is based on the 4th edition of Dungeons & Dragons, but adapts things slightly so that the level ranges are greater: levels 1 to 30 are Heroic, 31 through 60 are Paragon, and 60+ are Epic. At each landmark you'll be able to assign feats, boosts, and paragon paths to channel your character's development.

These choices will determine your powers, abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. So make sure you check out the paths available to you in your character sheet first. Make a plan of where you want to end up before you start on a specific leveling path. It always pays to be prepared and some careful thought at this stage will help focus your character's overall development.

2) Pace Yourself



(Select to view)

If you're new to Neverwinter, the best advice is to take it slow and be sure to sample and savor all the great stories and environments that Neverwinter has to offer. You will face off against classic enemies and travel to places that are rightly cherished in D&D lore. Don't focus on leveling up so slavishly, that you rush through the game and miss lots of golden Neverwinter moments. You'll get the best XP from quests of your level or one higher and Sergeant Knox is a great resource for giving you exactly the right quest at exactly the right time.

3) Juice your boosts



(Select to view)

After you've played through the tutorial, it's time to apply some XP boosts to launch you on your journey. Zen, the game's currency, can be bought with real money or earned through Arc Quests.



(Select to view)

In Protector's Enclave, open up the Zen Store and become a VIP. The first tier grants a 10% XP bonus and comes with some other perks which are very useful. Also consider investing in an XP or Epic XP boost. Once activated, your character will earn double XP until you hit the pre-determined level cap. You might also consider becoming a dedicated follower of fashion, with clothes like the Inscribed Garment costing 1500 Zen but gaining you a massive 20% XP boost.

4) Quest don't grind



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In Neverwinter, quests will grant better XP than simply grinding your way through, so make sure you do every quest you can! Questing means not only will you receive XP from every monster you defeat, but you'll also get a handsome chunk of XP and treasure. Quests are also a lot more fun than grinding, with monsters to slay, a story to follow, and class-specific gear rewards to be earned.

Complete all the quests in the same area before heading back to claim your rewards and don't bother examining every single piece of gear you get. Save your upgrades until after you turn in an entire quest series, then you can use the new gear and supplement it with recovered loot. It's also best to limit gear upgrades to every five or 10 levels. It's much more efficient and saves a lot of time fussing over gear you'll quickly outgrow.

5) Become a slot machine

Every day VIP players are granted an Enchanted Key which will open Enchanted Lockboxes. Inside them you'll find Termalune Bars which can be used at the vendor in Protector's Enclave to purchase Rank 7 Azure Enchantments. When slotted into your equipment, these will grant huge additional XP.

At around 20th level, your character will get items with enhancement slots, with head, hands, and feet all having utility slots. Add Azure Enchantments into every utility slot and you'll earn a dragon's hoard's worth of additional XP. Keep track by hovering over your XP bar at the bottom of the screen to see your total XP bonus.

6) It pays to pray



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As you achieve 10th level, you'll be able to start invoking your deity at altars. When you pray, you are rewarded with XP and sometimes a lot more, so don't forget to invoke your god as often as you can. Not only do you get XP, you'll also gain Astral Diamonds, Ardent, and Celestial Coins, along with further enhancements and boosts, invaluable additions to power your leveling.

7) The power of many



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If you really want to boost hard, consider Group-based quests. Your best bet is to queue for group quests of around your level: most are repeatable and you can earn good XP, as well as some decent gear. The advantage of working in a group is that you can stay in the queue while you are off working on your own quests. When a group is formed, you'll be teleported right into the quest and when it's over, you'll be teleported straight back to where you were, saving you quite a bit of time as well.

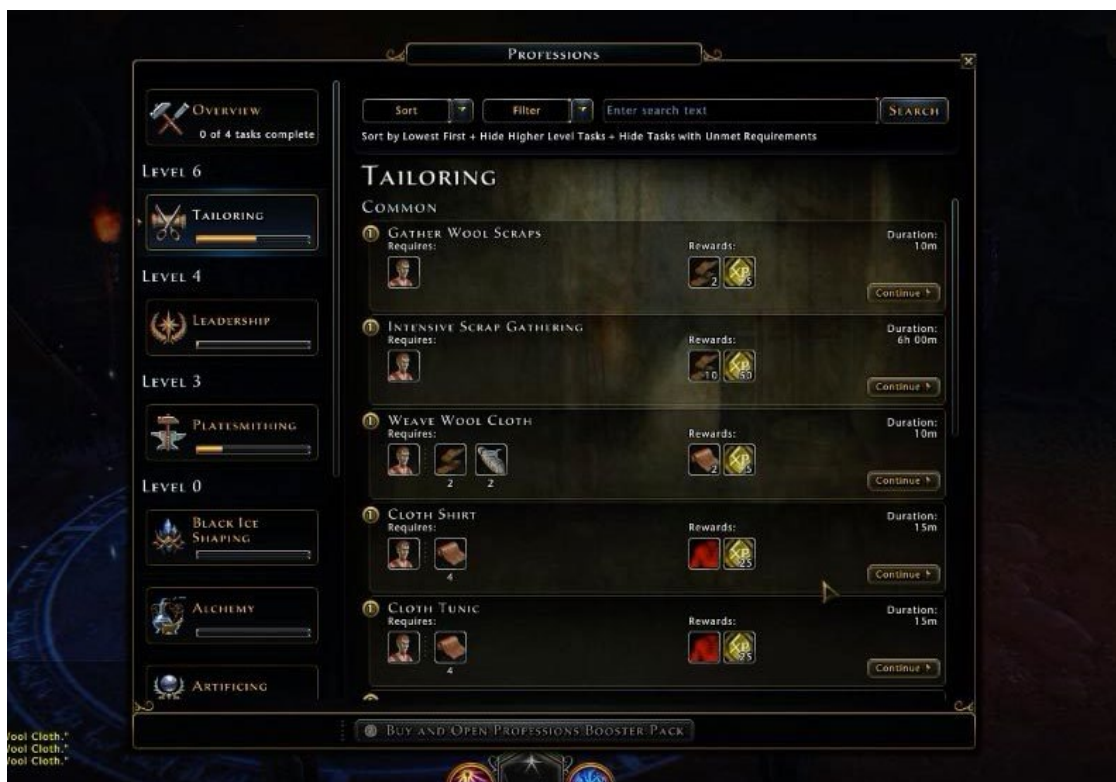
8) Imbibe a daily dose of dragon

Once you head into Neverdeath Graveyard you can begin to take part in the Cult of the Dragon events. The zones with Cult of the Dragon events have daily quests and these can be picked up in addition to regular quests, if you're looking to earn every extra iota of XP.



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9) Become crafty

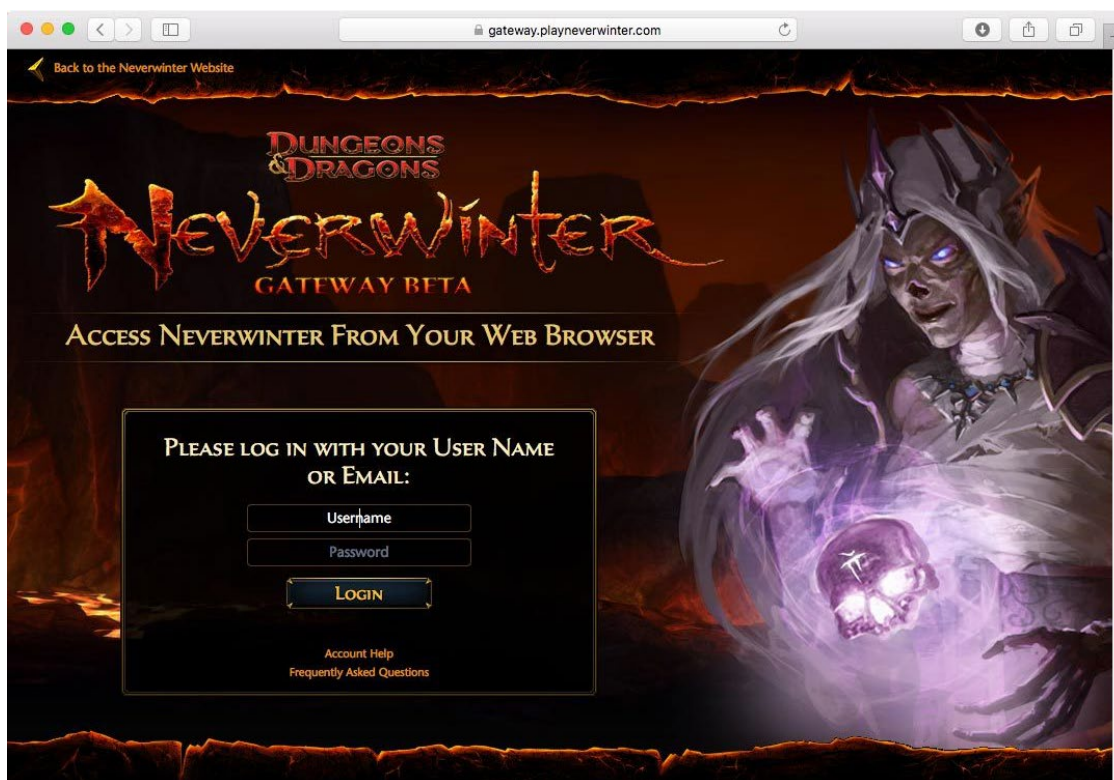


It's also possible to earn XP from crafting while you are questing. Crafting on its own is a slow and laborious process, but it is possible to level a character from 10 to 60 by crafting alone – we know, we've done it – but we wouldn't recommend it!

Make sure you always have crafters working on tasks to get a slow

but regular XP infusion while you pound out the quests. For the best results use Leadership and the shortest duration possible.

10) Money for nothing



(Select to view)

Don't forget the magical powers of the Neverwinter Gateway. You can level up using just your internet browser when you are not even logged into the game!

Power Leveling Philosophy

The best power leveling strategy always earns as much XP per hour as the game permits. Here's a quick summary of everything you need to do to maximize your XP output.

- Optimize your account through bonuses and your character through XP-boosting gear.
- Focus on leveling via the quests in the main story arcs of Neverwinter and don't forget to pick up as many side quests as you can along the way.
- Keep your crafters busy and make sure to invoke your god as

often as possible.

- Queue for the Daily Dungeons and Skirmishes.
- Don't forget Neverwinter Gateway – continue your leveling even when you're offline.

With these tips and tricks, you will level up very quickly but also experience much of what Neverwinter has to offer. Before you know it, your character will cruise to level 60 and beyond. But don't forget, to take a break from power leveling once in a while and enjoy Neverwinter's great storylines, involving quests, and awe-inspiring moments. Although you may want to get to your destination as quickly as possible, don't forget half of the fun of the journey is enjoying the ride!

BACK TO TOP



Forging the Forgotten Realms

Ed Greenwood recalls the birth of the Forgotten Realms, talks about his new novel *Death Masks* and offers sage advice for Dungeon Masters Guild creators.

Renowned fantasy author Ed Greenwood is the original creator of the beloved Forgotten Realms setting and a long time contributor to D&D, including *Dragon+*. With a career that began in the seventies, he's written a whole realm's worth of novels, articles, and D&D supplements, and he invented some of the Forgotten Realm's finest characters and most memorable locations. Here, Ed talks about the early days of the Forgotten Realms, recalls some of the challenges and joys of creating such an epic universe, and discusses his new novel *Death Masks*.

How did the idea for the Forgotten Realms first come about? Can you tell us a bit about the founding of the legend?

By the age of five, I'd read almost everything in my father's book-crammed den; it was a treasure trove of classics and ancient forgotten books and pulps and even what passed for racy stuff in earlier eras.

I'd often run upstairs to ask my Dad excitedly, "Is there a sequel to this? Is there more?" ...and all too often, he'd reply, "No, and that writer's been dead for forty years. If you want any more, you'll have to write it yourself." To which I'd usually reply, "Okay!" and sit down to try. With mostly horrible results. The Realms really got going when I noticed Fritz Leiber's *Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser* short stories in the magazines I was reading. They were self-contained stories but also episodes in the careers of the two main characters set in the same world, about which the reader learned just a little more in each story. So, fifty years ago, I set about creating my own world, in which the fat, wheezing old swindler Mirt the Moneylender had adventures up and down the Sword Coast. Preceding the Dungeons & Dragons game, by the way, by at least seven years.

What were the main influences when you first conceived the setting? Did it evolve and change much during your early playing sessions?

My main influences were all the writers whose works I loved, books and short stories I'd discovered in my father's den (Wodehouse, Kipling, Dunsany, Tolkien, William Morris, Leiber, Burroughs, Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, Charteris, John Dickson Carr), and later Zelazny, de Camp, Carter, John Bellairs, E.E. "Doc" Smith, Brackett, Moore, Kuttner, and Thorne Smith, and later again LeGuin, McKillip, McKinley, and many more . . . all of these played a part. I read voraciously, in all genres. Although I tried D&D in 1975, regular D&D play sessions really only got going steadily in 1978, and their major impact was to deepen the detail of the already-established Realms thanks to my players having characters who lived daily lives, had "day jobs" between adventures and hobbies and investments and so on, and wanted to know all about what their characters ate (and how it was cooked), what things cost, and on and on...I fell into the habit of worldbuilding every day, adding a little bit more to Realmslore. And I still do, every day.



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What was the biggest challenge in creating the Forgotten Realms and why do you think it's become such a popular, enduring universe?

In creating the published Realms, the biggest challenge has been, and remains, trying to keep everything consistent, with so many cooks in the kitchen. The Realms has its own internal logic; factions and individuals take stands, pursue plans, and make decisions that to them make sense, at a particular time and in a particular place. I think the Realms become so popular because it feels *alive*; it's a living backdrop DMs and readers can visit, fall in love with, and tinker with. And it largely feels alive because all of the creators who work on it try to treat it as if it's real, to make things three-dimensional rather than false fronts where the only driving forces are what players sitting around a gaming table do. If the world has an unfolding history, then your character's heroics *matter*.

You must have a fund of great stories and tales from the early days of its creation, any particular fond memories?

I've written before about the wonderful lady September, who introduced me and some of my gaming friends to full-on ("ham acting," if you prefer) roleplaying. She inspired me, and still does, though she's sadly been dead for years.

Other fond memories involve spending months mapping and detailing rooms on the uppermost levels of Undermountain, and then spending more months detailing the city of Waterdeep above that mega-dungeon.

Later on, I recall wonderful early play sessions that evolved into the Knights of Myth Drannor, my long-running "home" Realms play

group, playing alongside a bunch of my lifelong friends, though we no longer have the leisure time to devote to play sessions like we did back in our school days.



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What do you think have been the most interesting developments in Forgotten Realms over the years? What are some of your personal highlights?

To me, the most interesting developments are seeing how fiction writers like Elaine Cunningham, Bob Salvatore, and the writing team of Jeff Grubb and Kate Novak made the Realms richer and deeper by adding their own creative elements in a way that “fit” the Realms, yet went in directions I would never have thought of, to make the world more colourful.

Watching game designers on staff and freelancers riff on the Realms (in products like *Aurora’s Whole Realms Catalog*) is an allied highlight, as books came out that described and detailed everything from wines of the Realms to how this or that “monster” race lives, views the world, and strives for.

Another highlight is watching newcomers like Erik Scott de Bie, Erin Evans, and Jaleigh Johnson blossom in the Realms and become really exciting writers whose every new book I pounce on. Yet another is the chance to work with talented staff fiction and game editors like Steven Schend or Susan Morris, or doing gonzo “idea brainstorming” with Jeff Grubb or Rob King...sheer delight.

My personal highlights involve filling in local details like I did in the

Volo's Guides series, or *Ed Greenwood Presents Elminster's Forgotten Realms* (not my title, folks! I need to breathe before the end of a title that long!). I love putting in support details so a DM and players who have limited play time together can really enjoy the adventure, and read and daydream about the Realms the rest of the time, by perusing these extra lore details. (Yes, lore can be overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be; just use what you come across, that you like and is relevant, and leave the rest. Like any government budget, it's *all* imaginary.)



(Select to view)

Did you ever think the Realms would grow into such a huge and superbly realised shared universe? What's it been like to see your world expanded and extended by players, authors, and video games?

I never thought the Realms would take hold and last and grow the way it has. It has been humbling to see it embraced worldwide, by so many folks, and it's a recurring delight to see who it's reached, and how it's brightened their lives. I have met people from all over the world, and made many friends, through our shared love of the Realms, and built great memories with them. And after all, making friends and great memories is what life is all about.

How have you seen D&D and roleplaying evolve and change over the years? Would you have ever predicted it would become such a huge phenomenon?

D&D has become mainstream in that it's far less a fringe activity played by a nerdy few and far more something done, or done in the past, by creative folks who now helm movie studios, law firms, corporations large and small, schools and libraries. The game is now something lots of us share, or have enjoyed, and that we recall fun

times and bright ideas from. It's the grandfather of a lot of computer games, fantasy fiction, and film and television projects derived from that fiction. It influences us all, culturally, far more than many realize, or would care to admit. Big business executives hire in consultants to "roleplay" dealing with difficult customers . . . and we gamers smile.

How do you see the Forgotten Realms developing in the future? What other stories from the Realms are yet to be told or indeed, would you like to tell?

I hope the Realms will make a successful leap onto the big screen and found a successful franchise, that becomes a rising tide that revitalizes lines of novels, television mini-series, tabletop adventures, and everything from handpuppets to minis to energetic musical offerings. Like most gamers, I want it all. My wallet may not be able to keep up, but that doesn't mean I don't want real swords and costumes I can wear and three-dimensional models of backalley neighborhoods in Waterdeep...

And I designed the Realms to be a world for stories. Thousands of stories, subplots upon overlapping subplots, the intrigues and brute-force geopolitics of thousands upon thousands of characters, from dragons and giants to humans and elves.



(Select to view)

Your new novel is *Death Masks*, what inspired you to create this new story?

My long-running novel contract with Wizards of the Coast is for Elminster stories, but that doesn't mean I want him to become a boring superhero who says and does the same things in the same sort of story situation for book after book. Rather, I want him to be challenged, in different places and situations, with a cast of characters around him who, between the covers of the book in your hands, are

just as important as the Sage of Shadowdale, and get (as much as I can manage) the same attention and focus and detail. The Realms is a world full of living, breathing beings, not a stage upon which a few shining heroes and dastardly villains strut, with everyone else a bystander or spear carrier standing around for redshirt casualty purposes.

Could you tell us a little bit about the setting, storyline and characters?

It is the Year of the Scarlet Witch (1491 DR), as Elminster and Mirt arrive in Waterdeep and soon become aware that Mirt's Mansion is now the home of the new Open Lord of Waterdeep, Elminster's fellow Chosen Laeral. At about the time that she and an increasingly large number of unfortunate Masked or Hidden Lords of Waterdeep become aware that someone is murdering Masked Lords. Lots of Masked Lords, in a hurry. As lords and nobles and ambitious merchants scheme, villains plot, monsters lurk, and young adventurers newly arrived in the fabled City of Splendors try to seek their fortunes. As Laeral tries to rule, the Blackstaff tries to see the right things to do and do them, and the killings go on, faster and grimmer . . .

It must have been intriguing to create a mystery-thriller set in a fantasy world. What were the main challenges and indeed advantages in blending these two genres?

The main challenge in a fantasy murder mystery is arranging the circumstances so a simple spell or two can't reveal too much so the stakes are lessened for characters in the story.

I tried this before in my previous Realms novel, *Spellstorm*, with a "locked mansion" setup that goes from mystery to action-adventure. Like Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* or any of the hundreds of other non-fantasy locked-room mysteries, one useful story element is to isolate the cast so the reader knows the murderer must be one (or more) of these people right in front of them, on site.

In *Death Masks*, I went the other way: in a city where hundreds of thousands of people live, the list of suspects is almost endless. And whodunit is a lot less interesting than *why* they're doing it. In this case, killing Masked Lord after Masked Lord of Waterdeep. Who's slaying, and why? Can we stop them before . . .?

The advantages are: everyone loves a touch of mystery, and a mystery story with high stakes lets us see characters upset and unguarded and trying to figure things out right in front of us, showing us a lot of back stairs and everyday life details we'd otherwise never see. In *Death Masks*, the city of Waterdeep becomes a character, and you get hints and glimpses of a lot of Realms details that you will not have seen before.



(Select to view)

Have you had a chance to look at the new Dungeon Masters Guild? What do you think of this initiative? Do you think it's important to give players and DMs a real platform for their creations?

Yes, I've had some brief chances to look at some Dungeon Masters Guild releases, notably the wonderful lore stuff long time Realms loremaster George Krashos is penning and putting up on the site (highly recommended, by the way!).

I think the Guild is a great idea for restoring the "steady flow of D&D adventures" that in long-gone days Judges Guild provided alongside TSR. Like every gaming venue, there will be releases you as a gamer like and find useful, and releases that you'll find less so.

I like the idea of giving players and DMs a platform to easily share their creations, so long as they honor copyright and so on.

Have you any advice for players and designers for creating material for the Dungeon Masters Guild? What are the most important things to focus on as a designer or DM?

The only reason for any gamer to pick up anything for their game is for it to be useful and attractive. Write clearly, organize things logically, and don't ramble and make me try to hunt for stuff. Keep

things small and local in scope (this village or town, not trying to detail entire empires), and if writing something for the Realms, unless you explicitly want to explore a “what if?” alternative (what if rival dragons openly ruled all the kingdoms), don’t wildly change Realms canon. Build on it, extend it in new and interesting ways, but don’t change it just because you can, or you’ll blindsides a lot of folks hoping to just use what you’ve written in their campaign with a minimum of redesign work.

What do you hope to see creators bring to the Forgotten Realms setting via the Dungeon Masters Guild?

Short, useful, deployable adventures (game and lore material, not fiction) for low-level parties. Wizards of the Coast is giving you large, long-running storylines that end up by the end of the story challenging powerful player characters. Give us lots of useful small stuff and mid-level stuff. Do the DM’s work of describing and detailing. And keep it fun!

Elminster is one of your most popular and enduring characters, do you have any plans for further adventures for the Sage of Shadowdale?

Oh, yes, but I can’t *tell* you. If I do, Elminster will get irritated and just refuse to play along. And if you get him riled, things can get dangerous. So let’s just say I have plans, and he has plans, and he usually (okay, *always*) wins.



(Select to view)

What’s next for Ed Greenwood? What other projects have you got peering over the horizon?

Watch the Dungeon Masters Guild in November or so for something

from me. Probably involving a neglected corner or spot in the Realms, and likely involving some long time Realms characters who do *not* answer to the name “Elminster.”

I’ve been creating the Realms for fifty years now and been largely too busy to explore other world-settings, except brief visits to play in Middle-Earth and with Sherlock Holmes and so on. So I’ve started my own publishing collective, The Ed Greenwood Group (please come and take a look, at [Onderlibrum.com](https://www.underlibrum.com)), to explore some of the ideas I haven’t had time to develop over the last fifty years—by bringing out more than a dozen shared world settings over the next decade or so.

Along with writers familiar to gamers and newcomers, over five hundred of us in all so far all over the world, I’ll be penning stories, creating music, doing audio dramas and jewelry and costumes and more in such settings as Hellmaw (seven novels out right now; daemons running amok in our world, and you are the food!), Pony Island Adventures (launches later this year; a code name for a vast fantasy world in which magic is quite different than the Realms), For Wolf & Empire (Victorian-era steampunk with lycanthropes), and many more (including space opera, hard SF, romantic horror, period Cthulhu-like horror fantasy).

And if you like your steampunk to be of the Gaslamp romp sort, I also have a novel out from Tor entitled *The Iron Assassin*.

And thanks for this chance to chat. It’s always fun to sit down and talk about the Realms!

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Unearthed Arcana: Feats

Mike Mearls discusses the mightiest of feats

This month's Unearthed Arcana introduces new feats for fifth edition D&D. Since using feats is an optional rule, it's important to never assume that a particular feat will be a part of the game. Ultimately though, feats serve to flesh out your character's identity by giving them a place in the world—a tangible essence that people can recognize, adding flavor and texture to your character without overpowering its class features.



BLADE MASTERY

You master the shortsword, longsword, scimitar, rapier, and greatsword. You gain the following benefits when using any of them:

- You gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls you make with the weapon.
- On your turn, you can use your reaction to assume a parrying stance, provided you have the weapon in hand. Doing so grants you a +1 bonus to your AC until the start of your next turn or until you're not holding the weapon.
- When you make an opportunity attack with the weapon, you have advantage on the attack roll.

-

Unearthed Arcana: Feats

Download full details on feats and how to use them here:

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Unearthed Arcana: Feats

Based on feedback from our surveys and a number of requests on Twitter (I'm @mikemearls if you want to give me a shout), this month's Unearthed Arcana introduces new feats for fifth edition D&D. Before we get to the details, though, let's take a moment to talk about feat design and the place of feats in the game.

To begin with, since using feats is an optional rule, it's important to never assume that a particular feat will be a part of the game. For instance, a class can't refer to a feat, and feats should never be granted as class features. As well, we can't rely on feats to carry the mechanical load for actions and abilities that should be captured in the core rules. A hypothetical feat that makes you a skilled gambler can't assume that the DM uses any specific rules for wagering, as we don't have core rules for those. Instead, such a feat might grant you a bonus to Wisdom checks to reflect your ability to read others, as well as granting advantage on any ability check made as part of a game of chance.

Just as importantly, feats shouldn't add a mechanical layer to parts of the game where we expect the Dungeon Master to make a judgment call or to adjudicate things on the fly. For example, a feat that allows you to adopt an alias would have to be written in such a way as to allow characters without the feat to still attempt such a deception. The feat might give you proficiency in one or more skills, a bonus to Charisma, and a specific benefit (such as a reroll) when adopting an alter ego you've spent time practicing, all of which can improve your chances of success. But it shouldn't serve as a barrier that prevents a character without the feat to assume someone's identity by way of ability checks and good roleplaying.

Mechanically, feats are also meant to be all-in-one options. We avoid chains of feats, just as we avoid making assumptions about your proficiencies or character class (unless this is unavoidable). A feat is a package that covers all the bases, allowing it to benefit any character.

Ultimately, feats should serve to flesh out your character's identity. By creating feats with names like Tavern Brawler and Sharpshooter, we're using language that you can imagine characters using to describe themselves. By having a place in the world—a tangible essence that people can recognize—feats can add a layer of flavor and texture to your character without overpowering the class features that define who your character is.

Weapon Mastery Feats

Let's take a look at feat design by way of example. I think it would be cool to create a series of feats that can grant characters expertise with specific weapons, similar to how Polearm Master works. What might that look like?

Warhammer Master

When you hit a creature with a warhammer, the creature must succeed on a Strength saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Strength modifier) or be knocked prone.

In addition, you can use your warhammer to knock away a foe's shield. If you hit a creature that's using a shield, you can have the attack deal no damage and force the creature to drop its shield.

Why I Hate this Feat

This first attempt at creating a feat for characters using a warhammer has huge problems. To start with, it triggers additional die rolls every time a character hits. That's irritating enough at low levels, but at higher levels and with multiple attacks, it can quickly run out of control.

The ability to knock aside an opponent's shield is nifty—but that's something any character should be able to attempt. Locking that down into a feat threatens to limit the game's flexibility. You could argue that anyone could still try that trick, but the way the feat frames the ability makes it sound like only characters with this feat can succeed. This option is an area that I'd want

DMs to adjudicate on their own, rather than bloating the game with fiddly rules.

Finally, this feat is fairly narrow. It applies to only one weapon, when its net effect could probably apply to almost any bludgeoning weapon.

Here's a different take on it.

Fell Handed

You master the handaxe, battleaxe, greataxe, warhammer, and maul. You gain the following benefits when using any of them:

- You gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls you make with the weapon.
- Whenever you have advantage on a melee attack roll you make with the weapon and hit, you can knock the target prone if the lower of the two d20 rolls would also hit the target.
- Whenever you have disadvantage on a melee attack roll you make with the weapon, the target takes bludgeoning damage equal to your Strength modifier (minimum of 0) if the attack misses but the higher of the two d20 rolls would have hit.
- If you use the Help action to aid an ally's melee attack while you're wielding the weapon, you knock the target's shield aside momentarily. In addition to the ally gaining advantage on the attack roll, the ally gains a +2 bonus to the roll if the target is using a shield.

Why I Like this Feat

A number of things about this improved version of the feat make me happy. To start with, it applies to a broad range of characters. I toyed with the idea of having it apply just to heavy weapons, but I like the flavor of capturing a range of weapons normally associated with dwarves.

The attack bonus is a handy benefit that applies to every attack you make, without requiring any obnoxious handling or interruptions.

The benefit on advantage and disadvantage gives you a nifty added edge in a fight. It reflects the idea that, as an ironhanded master of weapons, you can turn an advantage into an

overwhelming edge and can rescue some shred of success from disadvantage.

Finally, the added benefit to the Help action grants a narrow but useful option without overriding improvisation. This type of benefit improves a standard action you can take, while coloring that action with a special benefit applicable to your expertise. It doesn't stop another character from attempting something similar while using the Help action. It simply leaves it up to the DM to decide what check that character needs to make in order to accomplish what your training allows you to do automatically.

Of course, our collective playtest efforts have the final say on this feat. But hopefully it provides you with a good idea of our design direction as we look at adding more feats to the game.

The rest of this article presents a number of new feats, each of which has been designed with the concepts outlined here in mind. Each feat also includes a short commentary to give you some insight into the thinking behind it. By giving you more insight into feats, we hope the feedback you give us in return will help sharpen our sense of what works and what you'd like to see more of.

Blade Mastery

You master the shortsword, longsword, scimitar, rapier, and greatsword. You gain the following benefits when using any of them:

- You gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls you make with the weapon.
- On your turn, you can use your reaction to assume a parrying stance, provided you have the weapon in hand. Doing so grants you a +1 bonus to your AC until the start of your next turn or until you're not holding the weapon.
- When you make an opportunity attack with the weapon, you have advantage on the attack roll.

Why I Like this Feat

This feat is simple, but it provides a tangible boost to both offense and defense.

The bonus to attack rolls captures the idea that your focus makes you better with blades than you are with other weapons. The math is simple enough that it doesn't slow down the game.

The second benefit tries to capture the idea of a sword as a superior defensive weapon, as compared to axes, hammers, and so on. By focusing on defense rather than keeping your eyes open for the opportunity to counterattack, you make yourself harder to hit.

The final benefit is a contrast to parrying. If you forgo your sword's defensive capabilities, you can strike quickly and more efficiently when taking advantage of a foe's distraction.

Flail Mastery

The flail is a tricky weapon to use, but you have spent countless hours mastering it. You gain the following benefits.

- You gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls you make with a flail.
- As a bonus action on your turn, you can prepare yourself to extend your flail to sweep over targets' shields. Until the end of this turn, your attack rolls with a flail gain a +2 bonus against any target using a shield.
- When you hit with an opportunity attack using a flail, the target must succeed on a Strength saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Strength modifier) or be knocked prone.

Why I Like this Feat

I tackled the weapon mastery feats first, and I wanted to make sure that each of them had a distinct flavor. The sword version of this feat is fairly generic by design, since it needs to appeal to a broad range of players. That means the other feats can appeal to players looking for something a little more esoteric. The Flail Master feat thus specializes in neutralizing shields and trying to knock opponents prone, playing into the idea of a flail's ability to whip around an object or entangle a foe's legs.

Spear Mastery

Though the spear is a simple weapon to learn, it rewards you for the time you have taken to master it. You gain the following benefits.

- You gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls you make with a spear.
- When you use a spear, its damage die changes from a d6 to a d8, and from a d8 to a d10 when wielded with two hands. (This benefit has no effect if another feature has already improved the weapon's die.)
- You can set your spear to receive a charge. As a bonus action, choose a creature you can see that is at least 20 feet away from you. If that creature moves within your spear's reach on its next turn, you can make a melee attack against it with your spear as a reaction. If the attack hits, the target takes an extra 1d8 piercing damage, or an extra 1d10 piercing damage if you wield the spear with two hands. You can't use this ability if the creature used the Disengage action before moving.
- As a bonus action on your turn, you can increase your reach with a spear by 5 feet for the rest of your turn.

Why I Like this Feat

This feat looks a little different from the other members of the weapon mastery family because it focuses on a simple weapon. It grants the same +1 bonus to attack rolls as the other feats, but it also boosts the spear's damage to make it equal to martial weapons.

The third element focuses on making the spear a useful defensive weapon. Given that fifth edition D&D doesn't have a specific action for charging, the ability to skewer an incoming enemy requires a bit of finesse. This feat sets up a situation that requires an opponent to move a noticeable distance toward you. Shutting off your attack with Disengage allows a creature to approach you carefully by forgoing its action to attack, even as forcing you to commit to a specific opponent makes the benefit faster to resolve. This way, the DM doesn't need to check whether you want to attack every single creature that moves up to you.

The extra reach is a minor ability, but one that reflects the spear's nature in a simple, easy way.

Tool Feats

Weapons are fun, but feats are intended to support all parts of the game. To that end, here are a few feats that grant proficiency with tools and some additional thematic benefits.

Alchemist

You have studied the secrets of alchemy and are an expert in its practice, gaining the following benefits:

- Increase your Intelligence score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency with alchemist's supplies. If you are already proficient with them, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with them.
- As an action, you can identify one potion within 5 feet of you, as if you had tasted it. You must see the liquid for this benefit to work.
- Over the course of any short rest, you can temporarily improve the potency of one *potion of healing* of any rarity. To use this benefit, you must have alchemist's supplies with you, and the potion must be within reach. If the potion is drunk no more than 1 hour after the short rest ends, the creature drinking the potion can forgo the potion's die roll and regains the maximum number of hit points that the potion can restore.

Burglar

You pride yourself on your quickness and your close study of certain clandestine activities. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Dexterity score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency with thieves' tools. If you are already proficient with them, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with them.

Gourmand

You have mastered a variety of special recipes, allowing you to prepare exotic dishes with useful effects. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Constitution score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency with cook's utensils. If you are already proficient with them, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with them.
- As an action, you can inspect a drink or plate of food within 5 feet of you and determine whether it is poisoned, provided that you can see and smell it.
- During a long rest, you can prepare and serve a meal that helps you and your allies recover from the rigors of adventuring, provided you have suitable food, cook's utensils, and other supplies on hand. The meal serves up to six people, and each person who eats it regains two additional Hit Dice at the end of the long rest. In addition, those who partake of the meal have advantage on Constitution saving throws against disease for the next 24 hours.

Master of Disguise

You have honed your ability to shape your personality and to read the personalities of others. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Charisma score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency with the disguise kit. If you are already proficient with it, you add double your proficiency bonus to checks you make with it.
- If you spend 1 hour observing a creature, you can then spend 8 hours crafting a disguise you can quickly don to mimic that creature. Making the disguise requires a disguise kit. You must make checks as normal to disguise yourself, but you can assume the disguise as an action.

Why I Like these Feats

Tools are a fun part of the game, but it sometimes takes a lot of work from the DM to

bring them into play. For example, cook's utensils are only as useful as the adventure or campaign allows them to be, since they don't have a clear role in the three core pillars of the game: combat, interaction, and discovery. On top of making the numerical bonus provided by tools significantly higher, the feats above try to add concrete benefits to those tools. Thieves' tools are an exception, though. Because traps and locks are such a common part of the game, the extra bonus the feat provides is powerful enough in and of itself.



Sage Advice

Jeremy Crawford chairs the monthly column that gives official clarification of D&D rules, and provides reference documents to help your D&D campaign run smoothly. The first rule of Sage Advice? Jeremy's word is the definitive one.

Class Features



(Select to view)

Is the Dueling fighting style intended to support a shield?

Yes. A character with the Dueling option usually pairs a one-handed weapon with a shield, a spellcasting focus, or a free hand.

Does the warlock's Awakened Mind feature allow two-way telepathic communication?

The feature is intended to provide one-way communication. The warlock can use the feature to speak telepathically to a creature, but the feature doesn't give that creature the ability to telepathically reply. In contrast, the telepathy ability that some monsters have (MM, 9) does make two-way communication possible.

Does Uncanny Dodge work automatically against every attack a rogue or ranger gets hit by? Spell attacks too?

A use of Uncanny Dodge works against only one attack, since it expends your reaction, and only if you can see the attacker. It works

against attacks of all sorts, including spell attacks, but it is no help against a spell or other effect, such as fireball, that delivers its damage through a saving throw rather than an attack roll.

How does Arcane Ward interact with temporary hit points and damage resistance that an abjurer might have?

An Arcane Ward is not an extension of the wizard who creates it. It is a magical effect with its own hit points. Any temporary hit points, immunities, or resistances that the wizard has don't apply to the ward. The ward takes damage first. Any leftover damage is taken by the wizard and goes through the following game elements in order: (1) any relevant damage immunity, (2) any relevant damage resistance, (3) any temporary hit points, and (4) real hit points.

Feats



(Select to view)

For further advice on feats, see *Unearthed Arcana* in this issue.

Is it intentional that the second benefit of Crossbow Expert helps ranged spell attacks?

Yes, it's intentional. When you make a ranged attack roll within 5 feet of an enemy, you normally suffer disadvantage (PH, 195). The second benefit of Crossbow Expert prevents you from suffering that

disadvantage, whether or not the ranged attack is with a crossbow. When designing a feat with a narrow use, we consider adding at least one element that can benefit a character more broadly—a bit of mastery that your character brings from one situation to another. The second benefit of Crossbow Expert is such an element, as is the first benefit of Great Weapon Master. That element in Crossbow Expert shows that some of the character's expertise with one type of thing—crossbows, in this case—transfers to other things.

How does the Lucky feat interact with advantage and disadvantage?

The Lucky feat lets you spend a luck point; roll an extra d20 for an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw; and then choose which d20 to use. This is true no matter how many d20s are in the mix. For example, if you have disadvantage on your attack roll, you could spend a luck point, roll a third d20, and then decide which of the three dice to use. You still have disadvantage, since the feat doesn't say it gets rid of it, but you do get to pick the die. The Lucky feat is a great example of an exception to a general rule. The general rule I have in mind is the one that tells us how advantage and disadvantage work (PH, 173). The specific rule is the Lucky feat, and we know that a specific rule trumps a general rule if they conflict with each other (PH, 7).

Ability Checks



(Select to view)

Are attack rolls and saving throws basically specialized ability checks?

They aren't. It's easy to mistake the three rolls as three faces of the same thing, because they each involve rolling a d20, adding any modifiers, and comparing the total to a Difficulty Class, and they're all subject to advantage and disadvantage. In short, they share the same procedure for determining success or failure. Despite this common procedure, the three rolls are separate from each other. If something in the game, like the guidance spell, affects one of them, the other two aren't affected unless the rules specifically say so.

Does the bard's Jack of All Trades feature apply to attack rolls and saving throws that don't use the bard's proficiency bonus?

Nope. The feature benefits only ability checks. Don't forget that initiative rolls are Dexterity checks, so Jack of All Trades can benefit a bard's initiative, assuming the bard isn't already adding his or her

proficiency bonus to it.

Combat



(Select to view)

How does a reach weapon work with opportunity attacks?

An opportunity attack is normally triggered when a creature you can see moves beyond your reach (PH, 195). If you want to make an opportunity attack with a reach weapon, such as a glaive or a halberd, you can do so when a creature leaves the reach you have with that weapon. For example, if you're wielding a halberd, a creature that is right next to you could move 5 feet away without triggering an opportunity attack. If that creature tries to move an additional 5 feet—beyond your 10-foot reach—the creature then triggers an opportunity attack.

Spellcasting



(Select to view)

Can a spell with an attack roll be used as the attack in the Attack action or as part of the Extra Attack feature?

The short answer is no. As explained in the Player's Handbook, you can take one action on your turn in combat, in addition to moving. You choose your action from the options available to everyone—options such as Attack, Cast a Spell, and Dash—or you choose from among the special actions you've gained from a class, a feat, or another source. If you want to cast a spell on your turn, you take the Cast a Spell action. Doing so means you're not taking the Attack action or any other action.

It is true that a number of spells, such as fire bolt and ray of frost, involve making an attack, but you can't make such an attack without first casting the spell that delivers it. In other words, just because something involves an attack doesn't mean the Attack action is being used. By extension, the Extra Attack feature (given by several classes, including the fighter and paladin) doesn't let you cast extra attack spells. That feature specifically relies on the Attack action, not the Cast a Spell action or any other action. In summary, to make a

spell attack, you have to first cast a spell or use a feature that creates the spell's effect. A game feature, such as Extra Attack, that lets you make an attack doesn't let you cast a spell unless it says it does.

What level is a spell if you cast it without a spell slot?

Such a spell is cast at its lowest possible level, which is the level that appears near the top of its description. Unless you have a special ability that says otherwise, the only way to increase the level of a spell is to expend a higher-level spell slot when you cast it. Here are some examples:

- The warlock's Chains of Carceri feature lets a warlock cast hold monster without a spell slot. That casting of hold monster is, therefore, 5th level, which is the lowest possible level for that spell.
- The warlock's Thief of Five Fates feature lets a warlock cast bane with a spell slot, which means the spell is 1st level or higher, depending on the slot that the warlock expends to cast it.
- The monk's Disciple of the Elements feature lets the monk spend ki points, rather than a spell slot, to increase the level of a spell. This rule is true for player characters and monsters alike, which is why the innate spellcasters in the Monster Manual must cast an innate spell at its lowest possible level.

When you cast a spell like conjure woodland beings, does the spellcaster or the DM choose the creatures that are conjured?

A number of spells in the game let you summon creatures. Conjure animals, conjure celestial, conjure minor elementals, and conjure woodland beings are just a few examples. Some spells of this sort specify that the spellcaster chooses the creature conjured. For example, find familiar gives the caster a list of animals to choose from. Other spells of this sort let the spellcaster choose from among several broad options. For example, conjure minor elementals offers four options. Here are the first two:

- One elemental of challenge rating 2 or lower
- Two elementals of challenge rating 1 or lower

The design intent for options like these is that the spellcaster chooses one of them, and then the DM decides what creatures appear that fit the chosen option. For example, if you pick the second option, the

DM chooses the two elementals that have a challenge rating of 1 or lower. A spellcaster can certainly express a preference for what creatures shows up, but it's up to the DM to determine if they do. The DM will often choose creatures that are appropriate for the campaign and that will be fun to introduce in a scene.

Monsters



(Select to view)

Is natural armor considered light armor? Does natural armor cap a creature's Dexterity bonus?

No. Natural armor doesn't fit into the categories of light, medium, and heavy armor, and when you have it, it isn't considered to be an armor you're wearing. Natural armor doesn't limit a creature's Dexterity bonus.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeremy Crawford is the co-lead designer of fifth edition Dungeons & Dragons. He was the lead designer of the fifth edition *Player's Handbook* and one of the leads on the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. He

has worked on many other D&D books since coming to Wizards of the Coast in 2007.

If you have questions for a future installment of Sage Advice, please send them to sageadvice@wizards.com, or reach him on Twitter ([@JeremyECrawford](https://twitter.com/JeremyECrawford)), where he answers questions between installments of this column.

other resources

Visit these D&D reference documents for more clarifications:

[Basic Rules](#) for Dungeons & Dragons

D&D Spell List ([version 1.01](#))

Monsters by Challenge Rating

([version 1.0](#))

D&D Monsters by Type ([version 1.0](#))

Magic Items by Rarity ([version 1.0](#))

Conversions to 5th Edition D&D

([version 1.0](#))

And visit the [Character Sheet webpage](#) for blank character sheets, as well as pre-generated characters.

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Comic: Against the Giants

Two classic adventures re-imagined

Illustration by Jason Thompson

Inspired by the timeless G 1-3 series of adventures *Against the Giants*, Jason Thompson's hapless adventurers plot a hilarious course through the Glacial Rift of the Frost Giant Jarl and Steading of the Hill Giant Chief.

Thompson also creates walkthrough maps of classic D&D adventures, with Ravenloft Module I6 presented below for your education and amusement...

The first ever Dungeons & Dragons module!
Dungeon Module G 1

STEADING* OF THE HILL GIANT CHIEF

**steading (n.) a farm with a homestead*

START I, Duke Owen III, now to punish the giants who are raiding our fair Duchy of Geoff! For that cause I open the prisons and free you criminals who have been found guilty of brigandage, vagrancy, heresy, arson, pig theft and disturbing the peace! I lead you, fighter, ranger, thief, cleric, wizard, bard, cleric, illusionist, magic-user, other cleric and bard!
DEAL A LESSON TO THE HILL GIANTS, OR RETURN AND PUT YOUR HEADS UPON THE BLOCK!

My actual name is...
I don't want to hear it!

The first professional Dungeons & Dragons adventure!! (and you're already supposed to be level 8)

An adventure by Gary Gygax for character levels 8-12

1 AS SOON AS THEY ARE OUT OF SIGHT OF THE DUKE, THEY COME UP ON HIS HORSE. THE MISSION IS SUICIDAL AND GALLOPS AWAY.

2 REMAINING PARTY CONFERS IN NEARBY CAVE TO PLAN TACTICS AND LISTEN TO BARD'S ORGAN GRIPPING, DIVERSIFIED FIGHTER, THE ONLY ONE WITH PREVIOUS DUNGEON EXPERIENCE, REITERATES THE PARTY WITH CHIEF OF THE PALACE OF THE VAMPIRE QUEEN.

3 PARTY HAS RETURN TO THE GROUP HAVING LOST THE HORSE GAMBLING.

4 WARRIOR SCOUTS THE STRONGHOLD, REPORTING COLOR-GRADE AND IN TROOP INDEXES WITH NEWBORN'S SMELL.

5 THREE MEN BREAK THROUGH FRONT ENTRANCE, PREPARING BOY OF ROPE TO THE UP SURGE, LONG LEFT OF HALLING, ASSESSING SO HE CAN USE ABBREVIATED ON THEIR THROAT.

6 DAVID GARTS "CHARM ANIMALS" ON GIANT QUEEN'S PET BEAR.

7 PARTY BREAK INTO GIANT CHIEF'S CHAMBER WITH THE STUFFED HORN OF A BULL, A BULL'S HEAD, AND A BULL'S HORN. THE GIANT CHIEF'S WIFE, A MANSY PELL, SOLED LINENS, ETC.

8 PARTY DISCOVERS THAT THE GIANT KING AND QUEEN LIVE IN SEPARATE BEDROOMS, AS WARRIORS MAJOR SUPERIOR CLACK, BENCH FLOOR, CHIPS GLASSES AND CRACKS PLATES.

9 ILLUSIONIST GIANTS "INVISIBILITY OF DEATH" AND "RENDER THE SILENT" STUMBLER ALONG STEALTHY, UNABLE TO SEE OR HEAR EACH OTHER.

10 WARRIOR FIGHTER FINDS MAGIC GIANT SLAYING SWORD "SLAYING SWORD OF CHARLES THE ROBE, AGREES TO HELP.

11 PARTY FINDS A SHABBY CLOAK, A HOLY CHEESE, GIANT COOKING UTENSILS, A MANSY PELL, SOLED LINENS, ETC.

12 ESCALATING WARRIOR FIGHTER IN ONE ROOM, ASSESSING DIVIDES A PLAN TO FORGON THE GIANT CHIEF BETWEEN THE SCAP DOOR AND THE HALL.

13 THIEF, ASSESSING AND HALF-ORC FIGHTER BREAK INTO KING CHIEF, FIGHTER DISGUISES AS ORC SLAVE, ONLY TO BE FOILED BECAUSE HE NEVER LEARNED ORCISH.

14 ROOM-RENOVATION PLAN DOES NOT MEAN GIANTS SOUL BURNING OUT TO ALREADY CONTAIN PORTION OF STORM GIANT "STORM" TO IMPROVE CHIEF'S WIFE, WARRIORS MARKED PORTIONS EXPLODE, FILLING KITCHEN WITH CARBAGE AND ALLEGING THE GIANTS.

15 ANGRY WARRIOR STAFF CHASE THREE INTO IRON CELLARS, WHERE THREE SHIPS AND FORTS WARRIOR INTO A STAIR.

16 STORM GIANTS CHASE HALF-ORC FIGHTER INTO POOL, WHERE HE HOLDS HIS BREATH, AND SWIMS TO ANOTHER CAVERN.

17 HALLING ASSESSING JUMPS DOWN CARBAGE GATE TO ESCAPE, ONLY TO END UP IN TRAP COMPACTOR CONSISTING OF FOUR INSANE MANTICORES.

18 WITH THE POISONING PLAN FAILED, THE ADVENTURERS SUSPECT ATTACK THE GIANTS! BARRAGE IN SEPARATE BEDROOMS, WARRIORS MAJOR SUPERIOR CLACK, BENCH FLOOR, CHIPS GLASSES AND CRACKS PLATES.

19 FIRST HALL FIGHT ENDS WITH THE GIANTS' HEAD, ALONG WITH ILLUSIONIST, BARD AND MONKEY, REST OF PARTY ARE AT THE BRINK OF DEATH BUT, AS USUAL, STILL FUNCTIONING PERFECTLY.

20 SURVIVORS DESCEND TO BASEMENT, SINCE HALF-ORC FIGHTER IS ABSENT, DIVERSIFIED FIGHTER CASUALTY, NOTES THE BASEMENT MANTICORE IS "CLEARLY SUPERIOR TO ORCISH WORK."

21 SLAVE THIEF DISGUISES CAVE BEAR.

22 BURNINGSTAR-WIELDING BLOSSOMERS KILL CLERIC OF WORDS.

23 HALF-ORC FIGHTER DISGUISES AS A CHARACTER, TO GET PAST GUARDPOSTING TROGLODYTES.

24 SECOND FIGHTER MEETS THE ORC UNDER THE STAIRS, IS ESCAPED GLASSER WINE LING IN A LESS THAN BOY SQUARE GAVEN, SUBSTITUTING ON FINGER, STARRING ORC REBELS ARE NARRATED BY FIGHTER'S TALE OF "IRON BARRONS."

25 UNHOLY TEMPLE CAUSES FIGHTER TO GO PERMANENTLY INSANE JUST FROM LOOKING AT THE WALLS, REST OF PARTY MAKES HASTY EXIT.

26 CLERIC OF BLESSED IS ACCIDENTLY OUTRAGED TO FIND HALF-ORC LEAVES CONFINED IN BUTYRUT CELL.

27 FIRE GIANTS AND BLOSSOMERS MOUNT FINAL ATTACK ON HALLS, FINISHED BY DUNGEON KEEPER AND HIS GARIBOLDI, TO APPEAL JUST AS "HINDS" ARE "HINDS" HALF-ORC FIGHTER EMERGES FROM SEALED TUNNELS LEADING FORCE OF ORC REBELS.

28 ADVENTURERS FIND STILL-LIVING "ROBBY-SWEENEY" CLERIC OF PHALTIUS, TRY TO REBORN'S SECONDARY RESPONSE TO LIFE ALL THE DEAD PARTY MEMBERS (EXCEPT THOSE EATEN BY MANTICORES OR INSANE).

29 HALF-ORC LEAVES THE SMALLE YELLOW WOLF BEHIND SECRET DOOR, ALERTING THE PARTY TO CHIEF NICHOLAI'S SECRET TREASURE ROOM, WITHIN USE REVER OF A GOLD AND SILVER, TWO TROOP FLAMING SWORDS, AND A MAP SHOWING THE LABS OF THE HILL GIANT, FRIENDS THE EQUALLY APPEAL, FIGHT GIANTS, DIVERSIFIED IS NARRATED AVERTED WHEN THE 248 ORCS INITIALLY INSIST ON EQUAL SHARES OF TREASURE.

30 THE ADVENTURERS RECEIVE A HEROES' WELCOME.

31 HALF-ORC FIGHTER DECIDES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HIS ROOTS.

For saving the Kingdom I pardon your crimes and declare thee KNIGHTS OF GEOFF!
This is a most solemn and dignified occasion.
O fighter, cleric, magic-user —
I prefer to go by Pleading the Labyrinthine!
Your majesty! My name is Slugg Papp-a-shan! —
I do not mind that name!
Do you mind that name?
I do not mind that name!
I do not mind that name!

FINISH

BY JASON BRADLEY THOMPSON (©MOCKMAN)

For a higher resolution image, go [here](#).

The first ever Dungeons & Dragons module!
Dungeon Module G 1

STEADING* OF THE HILL GIANT CHIEF

START I, Duke Owen III, wish to punish the giants who are raiding our fair Duchy of Geoff! For that cause I open the prisons and free you criminals who have been found guilty of brigandage, vagrancy, heresy, arson, pig theft and disturbing the peace! I need me, fighter, ranger, thief, other fighter, third fighter, assassin, thief, cleric, illusionist, magic-user, other cleric and bard!
DEAL A LESSON TO THE HILL GIANTS, OR RETURN AND PUT YOUR HEADS UPON THE BLOCK!

My actual name is...
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AS SOON AS THEY ARE OUT OF SIGHT OF THE DUNGEON, THE PARTY MUST BE ON THE MOVE. THE MISSION IS SUICIDAL AND GALLOPS AWAY.

REMAINING PARTY CONFERES IN NEARBY CAVE TO PLAN TACTICS AND LISTEN TO BARD'S DRAGON SONGING. DIVERSIFIED FIGHTER, THE ONLY ONE WITH PREVIOUS DUNGEON EXPERIENCE, ABERTS THE PARTY WITH COURAGE OF THE PALACE OF THE VAMPIRE QUEEN.

THEY ARE RETURN TO THE GROUP HAVING LOST THE HORSE GAMBLING.

WARRIOR GOES TO THE STRONGHOLD, REPORTING COLOR-GAME AND THE PROCEEDINGS WITH NEW WOODS SHELL.

THEY SNEAK THROUGH FRONT ENTRANCE, PREPARING BOY OF ROPE TO THE UP SURPRISE. THEY LET UP HALLING ASSASSIN AS HE CAN USE ASSASSIN ON THEIR THROAT.

ASSASSIN FINDS A SHIRTY CLOAK, A HOLY CHEESE, GUN, COOKING UTENSILS, A MANKY PELT, SOLED LINENS, ETC.

ASSASSIN DIVIDES A PLAN TO FORNOC THE GIANT CHIEF BETWEEN THE SCAP COURSE AND THE HALL.

GIANT BARRONS AND QUEN CHIEF BARRONS WITH THE STUFFED HOGS OF PRODIGIOUS AND VICES. THE GIANT FORTS DANCE, CLODDY OF BULL.

DISCOVERING THAT THE GIANT KING AND QUEEN BARRONS IN SEPARATE BEDROOMS, THE WARRIOR SAYS HE IS WILLING TO DISGUISE AS QUENNESS.

DAVID GOES "CHARM ANIMALS" ON GIANT QUEEN'S PET BEAR.

ILLUSIONIST GOES "INVISIBILITY OF GEAR" AND "PILGERS" THE PARTY, STUMBLING ALONG STEALTHY, UNABLE TO SEE OR HEAR EACH OTHER.

WITH THE PROCKING PLAN FAILED, THE ADVENTURERS SUPPOSE ATTACK THE GIANTS! MAGIC-USER PLAYS ICE STORM OUT OF HIS HAT. WARRIOR PLAYS BATTLE ONLY TO FACE ANGRY BEAR. MAGIC-USER BLAMES HIS KNUVES, SINGS FROWN, CHIPS GLASSER AND CRACKS PLATES.

HALF-ORC FIGHTER DISGUISES AS A CHARACTER TO GET PAST GUARDPOSTING TROGLODYTES.

SECOND FIGHTER MEETS THE ORC UNDER THE STAIRS. HE ESCAPES GLASSER AND LIVES IN A LESS THAN BOY SQUARE GAVEN, SUBSTITUTING ON LENSES. STUMBLING ORC REBELS ARE NURSED BY FIGHTER'S TALE OF FROM RATIONS.

UNDOY TEMPLE CAUSES FIGHTER TO GO PERMANENTLY INANE JUST FROM OUTRAGED AT THE WARRIOR. REST OF PARTY MAKES HASTY EXIT.

CLERIC OF BLESSED IS ACCIDENTLY OUTRAGED AT THE WARRIOR, CONFINED IN OUTDOOR CELLS.

FIRE GIANTS AND BUGBEARS MOUNT FINAL ATTACK ON HILLER PARTY, LINED BY DUNGEON KEEPER AND HIS GARDIAN, TO APPEAL. HALF-ORC FIGHTER EMERGES FROM SEALED TUNNELS LEADING FORCE OF ORC REBELS.

ADVENTURERS FIND STILL-LIVING "ROASTY-SWEETED" CLERIC OF PHALTUS, WHO RECALLS HIS HISTORY RESEMBLES TO LIFE ALL THE REAL PARTY MEMBERS (EXCEPT THOSE EATEN BY MANTICORES OR INANE).

CLERIC IS JOINING THE SHARLS BELOW WOOD BEARD REVERE DOOR, ALERTING THE PARTY TO CHIEF MANDRA'S SECRET TREASURE ROOM. WITH USE OF ORC OF A GOLD AND OTHER TWO TALKING FLAMING SHRODS, AND A MAP SHOWING THE LABS OF THE HILL GIANT, FRIENDS THE EQUALITY APPEAL. FIGHT GIANTS, DUNGEON IS NARROWLY AVERTED WHEN THE 248 ORCS INITIALLY INSIST ON EQUAL SHARES OF TREASURE.

FINISH THE ADVENTURERS RECEIVE A HEROES' WELCOME.

For saving the Kingdom I pardon your crimes and declare thee KNIGHTS OF GEOFF!

O fighter, cleric, magic-user—
I prefer to go by Phalagus the Laydowner!

Your majesty! My name is Slugg! Pp-a-shan!

Um... do you have a menu in German?

Do you mind if I take a little of your...
I don't want to hear it!

BY JASON BRADLEY THOMPSON (©MOCKMAN)

For a higher resolution image, go [here](#).

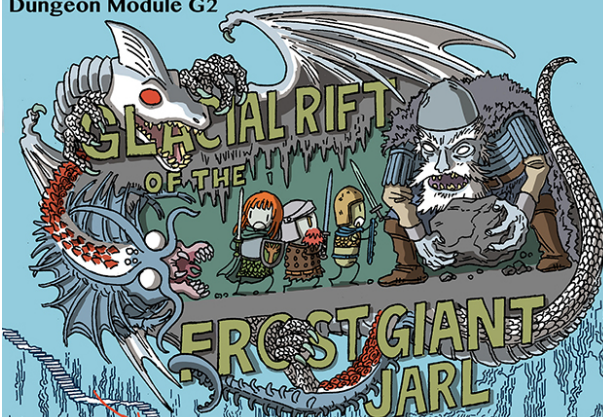
Comic artist, author and illustrator **Jason Thompson** currently runs a D&D campaign for his Monday night gaming group in San Francisco. His works include the Eisner-nominated *Manga: The Complete Guide*, *King of RPGs*, *H.P. Lovecraft's The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, and the tabletop game *Mangaka: The Fast & Furious Game of Drawing Comics*. His favorite things to draw are landscapes, plants, reptiles and amphibians.



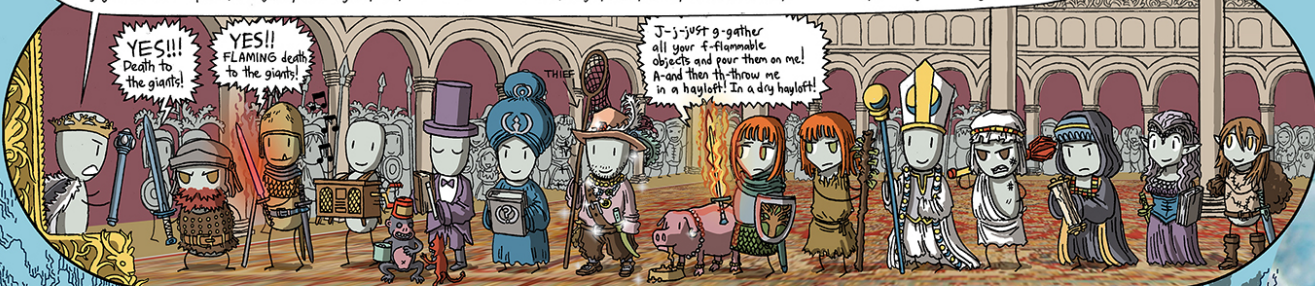
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Dungeon Module G2

The Second Professional Dungeons & Dragons Module • The First Search Result for "Glacial Rift" • AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTER LEVELS 8-12



The hill giants' atrocities have ceased, but the frost giants' raids continue unabated! Knights of Geoff, travel north to their stronghold and mete out death and destruction to the giants in the same measure they gave to the peoples below! May you return triumphant, O fighter, other fighter, bard, magic-user, illusionist, thief, ranger, druid, cleric, other two clerics, two new elves, and magical talking swords!



START

1 ADVENTURERS DESCEND INTO GLACIAL RAVINE, OUTFITTED WITH EARMUFFS, THERMAL FLEECE, QUIET HAND WARMS, AND WARMERS. RANGER TIES EVERYONE TOGETHER WITH ROPE SO NO ONE WILL FALL OFF CLIFF.

2 GIANT-SLAYING SWORD IS UNABLE TO RESIST SHOUTING "ANY #*%&!*\$ GIANTS IN HERE?" INTO CAVE ENTRANCE. FROST GIANT GUARDS RUSH OUT, HURLING BOULDERS.

3 FLAMING SWORD #2 IS UNABLE TO RESIST SHOUTING "ANY FLAMMABLE OBJECTS IN HERE?" NOISE CAUSES ROOF TO CAVE IN.

4 DWARF, ALWAYS KNOWN TO HIS PEOPLE AS "A FIGHTER, NOT A MINER" GIVES BAD ADVICE ON DIGGING THROUGH SQUIP ICE, CAUSING ROOF TO CAVE IN.

5 ELVEN THIEF SCOUTS AHEAD IN SEARCH OF SOMETHING TO STEAL, BUT MOVES UNSILENTLY AND AWAKENS 16 SLEEPING OGRES.

6 MAGIC-USER'S FIREBALL KILLS OGRES BUT MELTS ICY LEDGE CAUSING DWARF FIGHTER TO SLIP OFF 200' CLIFF. ROPE DRAGS REST OF PARTY ALONG WITH HIM.

7 BARD LANDS IN FLESH-EATING WHITE PUDDING.

8 DWARF FIGHTER IS SEPARATED FROM THE OTHERS AND WANDERS FOR DAYS IN THE BLINDING BLIZZARD, TALKING TO HIS SWORD AND SUFFERING FROSTBITE.

9 OTHER SURVIVORS SHELTER IN "LEOMUND'S IMPRESSIVE IOLOO" WHILE CLERIC OF PHOLTUS RESURRECTS THE DEAD. RANGER FINDS DWARF BY FOLLOWING TRAIL OF TOES.

10 REMORHAZ SWALLOWS CLERIC OF BLEERED. CLERIC OF KORD GETS THIRD-DEGREE THIGH BURNS TRYING TO TAME THE MONSTER BY RIDING IT. SEARCHING ITS LAIR THE PARTY FINDS A USELESS OLD RING AND RANGER FINDS ANOTHER, MORE SOFT-SPOKEN SWORD OF GIANT SLAYING.

11 HALF-ORC FIGHTER'S FLAMING SWORD RECOGNIZES YETI CHIEF'S FROST SWORD, WHO TURNS OUT TO BE ITS OLD FRIEND FROM THE SMITHY.

12 RANGER SLIPS AND DROPS FLAMING SWORD #2 DOWN A DEEP CRACK IN THE ICE WHERE IT CONTINUES TO CRY OUT FOR PHOSPHORUS AND KEROSENE WHILE SLOWLY MELTING THE GLACIER OVER THE COURSE OF 10,000 YEARS.

13 HALF-ORC FIGHTER DECAPITATES GIANT, WHOSE HEAD FALLS ON BARD'S MONKEY, CRUSHING IT.

14 THIEF'S PET PIG SNIFFS OUT GIANTS' LARDER BY THE DELICIOUS SMELL OF MAN-FLESH.

15 PARTY ALERTED TO DEADLY HEAT-LOVING BROWN MOLD WHEN FIGHTER'S FLAMING SWORD IS INFECTED AND TAKES ON THE APPEARANCE OF A CHOCOLATE BAR LEFT IN A SWIMMING POOL.

16 HILL GIANT AMBASSADORS' CRIES OF "DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY" DO NOT SPARE THEM THE PARTY'S REVENGE. ELVEN THIEF CLAIMS AMBASSADOR'S 6,000-GP GIANT MINK STOLE.

17 FIRE GIANT AMBASSADORS, DISCUSSING THE TERMS OF THEIR ALLIANCE WITH THE FROST GIANTS, PRIVATELY AGREE THAT IT IS AWKWARD THAT THEY MUST PASS THROUGH THE JARL'S BEDROOM TO GET TO THE TELEPORTATION GATE TO THEIR HOME REALM.

18 DRUID INVESTIGATES LAMP AND IS BITTEN IN THE FACE BY CAGED FIRE BEETLE.

19 WHEN THIEF OFFERS TO GIVE GIANTESSE A FOOT RUB, CLERIC OF KORD NEARLY STARTS A FIGHT. AFTER A PRIVATE APPOINTMENT

20

21

22

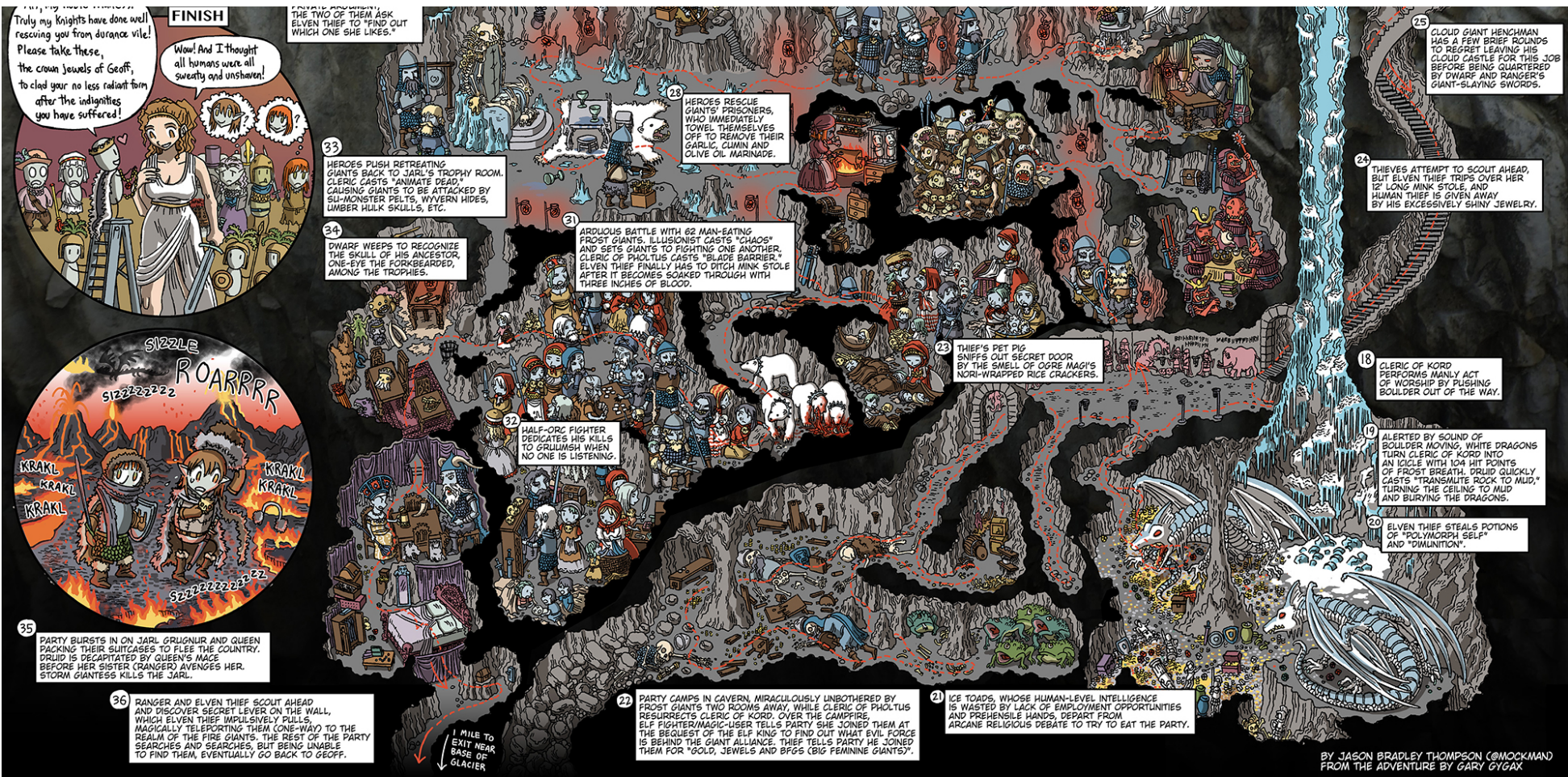
23

24

25

26 HERGES RESCUE COMELY STORM GIANTESSE. HUMAN THIEF INSTANTLY FALLS IN LOVE.

27 STORM GIANTESSE GRABS A SWORD AND JOINS THE PARTY IN FIGHTING FROST GIANTS. CLERIC OF KORD, WHO HAD ALWAYS BELIEVED NO WOMAN COULD HAVE HIGHER THAN 18350' STRENGTH, FALLS IN LOVE WATCHING HER IN BATTLE.



Truly my Knights have done well rescuing you from durance vile! Please take these, the crown jewels of Geoff, to clad your no less radiant form after the indignities you have suffered!

FINISH

Wow! And I thought all humans were all sweaty and unshaven!

THE TWO OF THEM ASK ELVEN THIEF TO "FIND OUT WHICH ONE SHE LIKES."

HEROES PUSH RETREATING GIANTS BACK TO JARL'S TROPHY ROOM. CLERIC CASTS "ANIMATE DEAD," CAUSING GIANTS TO BE ATTACKED BY SU-MONSTER PELTS, WYVERN HIDES, LUMBER HULK SKULLS, ETC.

SIZZLE
ROARRR
KRAKL
KRAKL
KRAKL
KRAKL

HEROES RESCUE GIANTS' PRISONERS, WHO IMMEDIATELY TOWEL THEMSELVES OFF TO REMOVE THEIR GARLIC, CLUMIN AND OLIVE OIL MARINADE.

ARDUOUS BATTLE WITH 62 MAN-EATING FROST GIANTS. ILLUSIONIST CASTS "CHAOS" AND SETS GIANTS TO FIGHTING ONE ANOTHER. CLERIC OF PHOLTUS CASTS "BLADE BARRIER." ELVEN THIEF FINALLY HAS TO DITCH MINK STOLE AFTER IT BECOMES SOAKED THROUGH WITH THREE INCHES OF BLOOD.

THIEF'S PET PIG SNIFFS OUT SECRET DOOR BY THE SMELL OF OGRE MAGI'S NORI-WRAPPED RICE CRACKERS.

DWARF WEEPS TO RECOGNIZE THE SKULL OF HIS ANCESTOR, ONE-EYE THE FORKBEARDED, AMONG THE TROPHIES.

HALF-ORC FIGHTER DEDICATES HIS KILLS TO GRULUMSH WHEN NO ONE IS LISTENING.

CLERIC OF KORD PERFORMS MANLY ACT OF WORSHIP BY PUSHING BOULDER OUT OF THE WAY.

ALERTED BY SOUND OF BOULDER MOVING, WHITE DRAGONS TURN CLERIC OF KORD INTO AN ICLE WITH 104 HIT POINTS OF FROST BREATH. DRUID QUICKLY CASTS "TRANSMUTE ROCK TO MUD," TURNING THE CEILING TO MUD AND BURYING THE DRAGONS.

ELVEN THIEF STEALS POTIONS OF "POLYKORPH SELF" AND "DILUTION".

PARTY BURSTS IN ON JARL, GRULUMSH AND QUEEN, PACKING THEIR SUITCASES TO FLEE THE COUNTRY. DRUID IS DECAPITATED BY QUEEN'S MACE BEFORE HER SISTER (RANGER) AVENGES HER. STORM GIANTESSE KILLS THE JARL.

RANGER AND ELVEN THIEF SCOUT AHEAD AND DISCOVER SECRET LEVER ON THE WALL, WHICH ELVEN THIEF IMPULSIVELY PULLS, MAGICALLY TELEPORTING THEM ONE-WAY TO THE REALM OF THE FIRE GIANTS. THE REST OF THE PARTY SEARCHES AND SEARCHES, BUT BEING UNABLE TO FIND THEM, EVENTUALLY GO BACK TO GEOFF.

PARTY CAMPS IN CAVERN, MIRACULOUSLY UNBOOTHERED BY FROST GIANTS TWO ROOMS AWAY, WHILE CLERIC OF PHOLTUS RESURRECTS CLERIC OF KORD. OVER THE CAMPFIRE ELF FIGHTER/MAGIC-USER TELLS PARTY SHE JOINED THEM AT THE BEQUEST OF THE ELF KING TO FIND OUT WHAT EVIL FORCE IS BEHIND THE GIANT ALLIANCE. THIEF TELLS PARTY HE JOINED THEM FOR "GOLD, JEWELS AND BFGS (BIG FEMINE GIANTS)".

ICE TOADS, WHOSE HUMAN-LEVEL INTELLIGENCE IS WASTED BY LACK OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND PREHENSILE HANDS, DEPART FROM ARCAINE RELIGIOUS DEBATE TO TRY TO EAT THE PARTY.

CLOUD GIANT HENCHMAN HAS A FEW BRIEF ROUNDS TO REGRET LEAVING HIS CLOUD CASTLE FOR THIS JOB BEFORE BEING QUARTERED BY DWARF AND RANGER'S GIANT-SLAYING SWORDS.

THIEVES ATTEMPT TO SCOUT AHEAD, BUT ELVEN THIEF TRIPS OVER HER 12' LONG MINK STOLE, AND HUMAN THIEF IS GIVEN AWAY BY HIS EXCESSIVELY SHINY JEWELRY.

CLERIC OF KORD PERFORMS MANLY ACT OF WORSHIP BY PUSHING BOULDER OUT OF THE WAY.

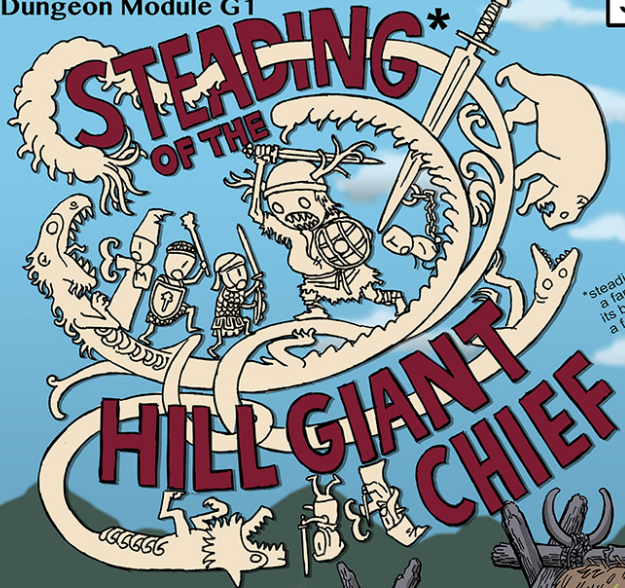
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ELVEN THIEF STEALS POTIONS OF "POLYKORPH SELF" AND "DILUTION".

1 MILE TO EXIT NEAR BASE OF GLACIER

BY JASON BRADLEY THOMPSON (©MOCKMAN) FROM THE ADVENTURE BY GARY GYGAX

The first ever Dungeons & Dragons module! Dungeon Module G1



START

I, Duke Owen III, vow to punish the giants who are raiding our fair Duchy of Geoff! For that cause I open the prisons and free you criminals who have been found guilty of brigandry, vagrancy, heresy, orcery, pig theft and disturbing the peace! Heed me, fighter, ranger, druid, other fighter, third fighter, assassin, thief, cleric, illusionist, magic-user, other cleric and bard! DEAL A LESSON TO THE HILL GIANTS, OR RETURN AND PUT YOUR HEADS UPON THE BLOCK!



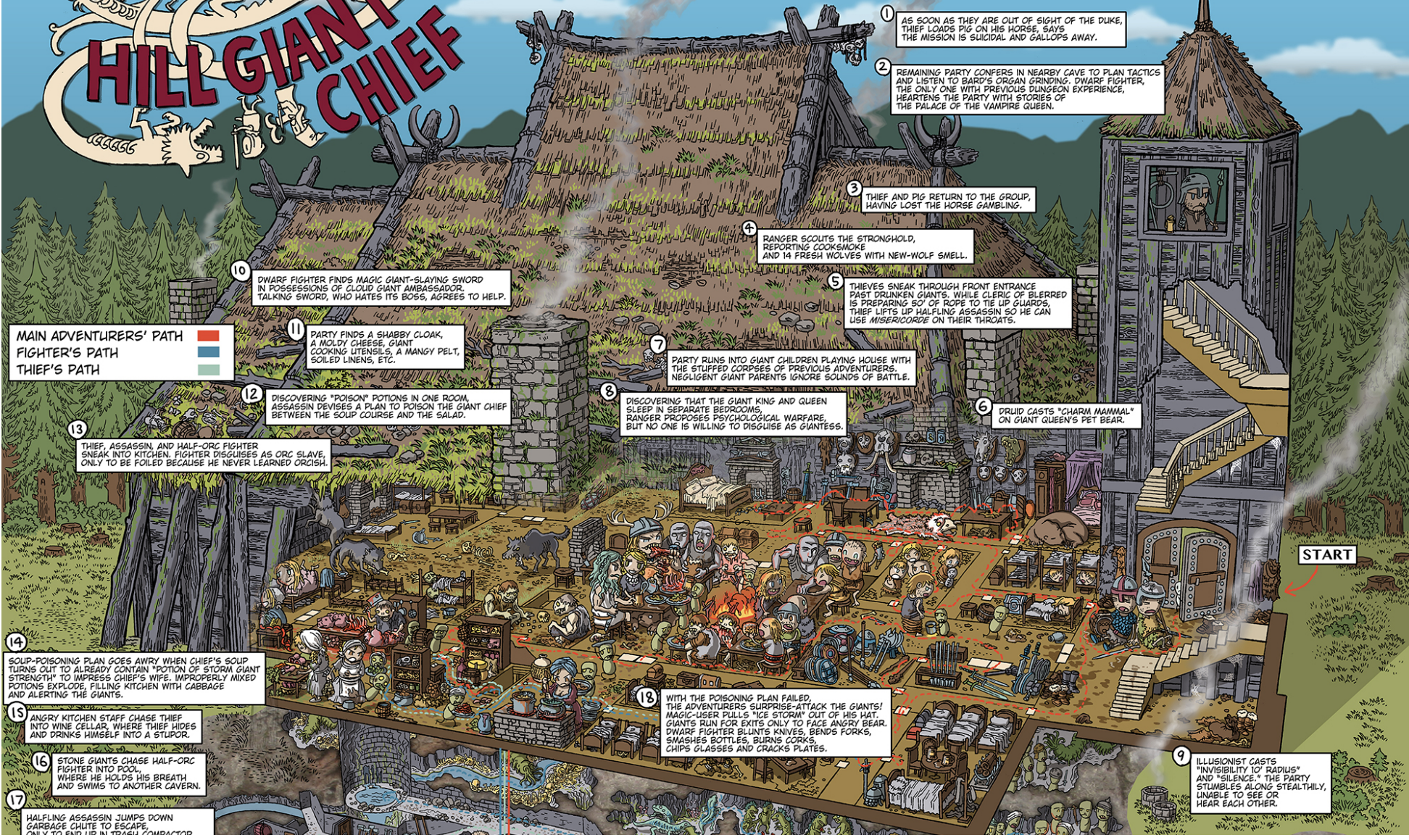
The first professional Dungeons & Dragons adventure!!!
(and you're already supposed to be level 8)

An adventure by Gary Gygax for character levels 8-12

MAIN ADVENTURERS' PATH (Red line)

FIGHTER'S PATH (Blue line)

THIEF'S PATH (Green line)



*steading (n.): a farm and its buildings; a farmstead

1 AS SOON AS THEY ARE OUT OF SIGHT OF THE DUKE, THIEF LOADS PIG ON HIS HORSE, SAYS THE MISSION IS SUICIDAL AND GALLOPS AWAY.

2 REMAINING PARTY CONFERS IN NEARBY CAVE TO PLAN TACTICS AND LISTEN TO BARD'S ORGAN GRINDING DWARF FIGHTER, THE ONLY ONE WITH PREVIOUS DUNGEON EXPERIENCE, HEARTENS THE PARTY WITH STORIES OF THE PALACE OF THE VAMPIRE QUEEN.

3 THIEF AND PIG RETURN TO THE GROUP, HAVING LOST THE HORSE GAMBLING.

4 RANGER SCOUTS THE STRONGHOLD, REPORTING COOKSMOKE AND 14 FRESH WOLVES WITH NEW-WOLF SMELL.

5 THIEVES SNEAK THROUGH FRONT ENTRANCE PAST DRUNKEN GIANTS, WHILE CLERIC OF BLEERED IS PREPARING SOI OF ROPE TO TIE UP GUARDS, THIEF LIFTS UP HALFLING ASSASSIN SO HE CAN USE MISERICORDIE ON THEIR THROATS.

10 DWARF FIGHTER FINDS MAGIC GIANT-SLAYING SWORD IN POSSESSIONS OF CLOUD GIANT AMBASSADOR. TALKING SWORD, WHO HATES ITS BOSS, AGREES TO HELP.

11 PARTY FINDS A SHABBY CLOAK, A MOLDY CHEESE, GIANT COOKING LITENSILS, A MANGY PELT, SOILED LINENS, ETC.

12 DISCOVERING "POISON" POTIONS IN ONE ROOM, ASSASSIN DEVICES A PLAN TO POISON THE GIANT CHIEF BETWEEN THE SOUP COURSE AND THE SALAD.

7 PARTY RUNS INTO GIANT CHILDREN PLAYING HOUSE WITH THE STUFFED CORPSES OF PREVIOUS ADVENTURERS. NEGLIGENT GIANT PARENTS IGNORE SOUNDS OF BATTLE.

8 DISCOVERING THAT THE GIANT KING AND QUEEN SLEEP IN SEPARATE BEDROOMS, RANGER PROPOSES PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE, BUT NO ONE IS WILLING TO DISGUISE AS GIANTNESS.

6 DRUID CASTS "CHARM MAMMAL" ON GIANT QUEEN'S PET BEAR.

13 THIEF, ASSASSIN, AND HALF-ORC FIGHTER SNEAK INTO KITCHEN. FIGHTER DISGUISES AS ORC SLAVE, ONLY TO BE FOLLED BECAUSE HE NEVER LEARNED ORCISH.

14 SOUP-POISONING PLAN GOES AWRY WHEN CHIEF'S SOUP TURNS OUT TO ALREADY CONTAIN "POTION OF STORM GIANT STRENGTH" TO IMPRESS CHIEF'S WIFE. IMPROPERLY MIXED POTIONS EXPLODE, FILLING KITCHEN WITH CABBAGE AND ALERTING THE GIANTS.

15 ANGRY KITCHEN STAFF CHASE THIEF INTO WINE CELLAR, WHERE THIEF HIDES AND DRINKS HIMSELF INTO A STUPOR.

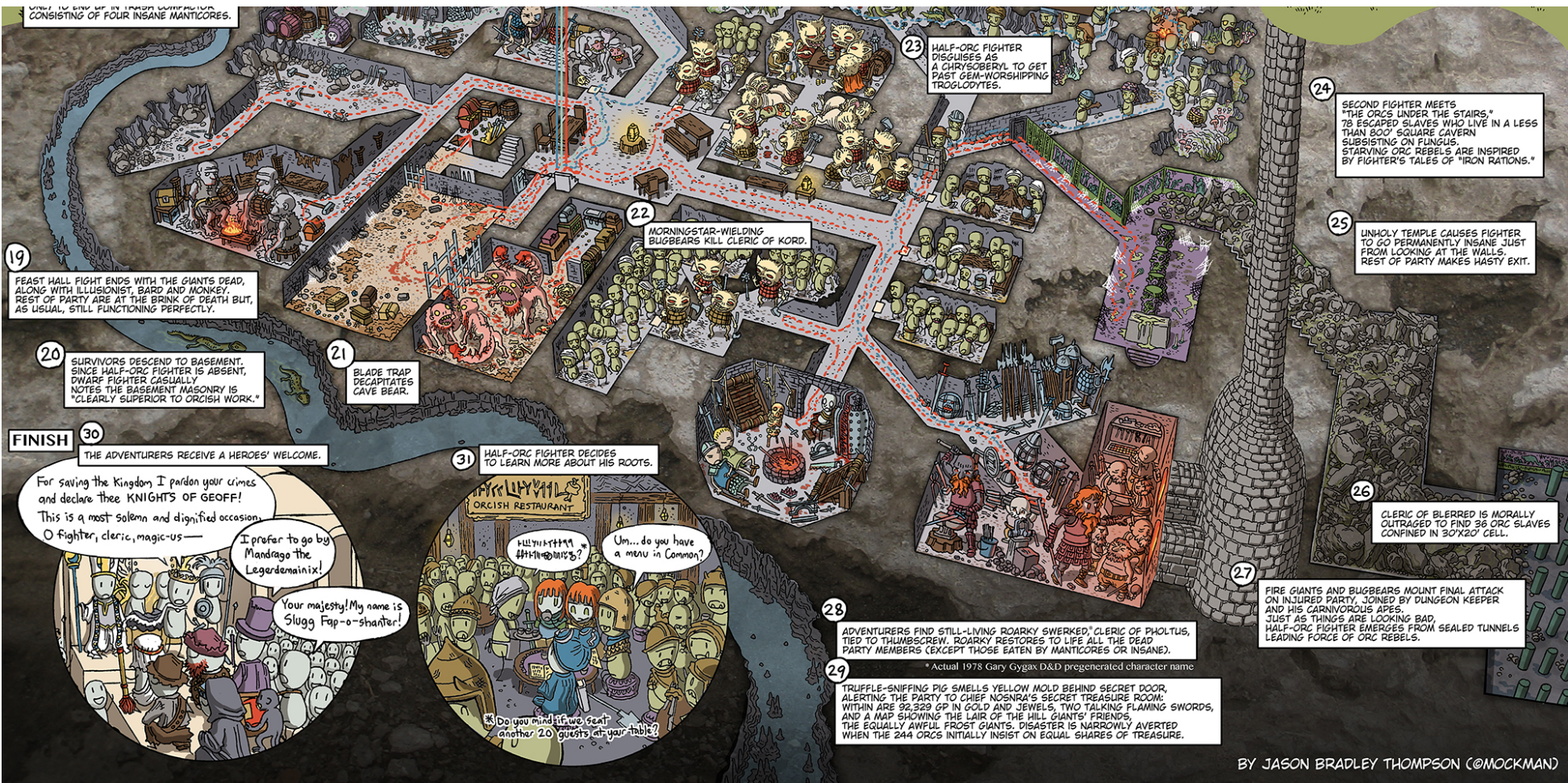
16 STONE GIANTS CHASE HALF-ORC FIGHTER INTO POOL, WHERE HE HOLDS HIS BREATH AND SWIMS TO ANOTHER CAVERN.

17 HALFLING ASSASSIN JUMPS DOWN GARBAGE CHUTE TO ESCAPE, ONLY TO END UP IN TRAPDOOR COMPARTMENT.

18 WITH THE POISONING PLAN FAILED, THE ADVENTURERS SURPRISE-ATTACK THE GIANTS! MAGIC-USER PULLS "ICE STORM" OUT OF HIS HAT. GIANTS RUN FOR EXITS ONLY TO FACE ANGRY BEAR. DWARF FIGHTER BLUNTS KNIVES, BENDS FORKS, SMASHES BOTTLES, BURNS COOKS' CHIPS GLASSES AND CRACKS PLATES.

9 ILLUSIONIST CASTS "INVISIBILITY 10' RADIUS" AND "SILENCE." THE PARTY STUMBLES ALONG STEALTHILY, UNABLE TO SEE OR HEAR EACH OTHER.

START



FEAST HALL FIGHT ENDS WITH THE GIANTS DEAD, ALONG WITH ILLUSIONIST, BARD AND MONKEY. REST OF PARTY ARE AT THE BRINK OF DEATH BUT, AS USUAL, STILL FUNCTIONING PERFECTLY.

19 FEAST HALL FIGHT ENDS WITH THE GIANTS DEAD, ALONG WITH ILLUSIONIST, BARD AND MONKEY. REST OF PARTY ARE AT THE BRINK OF DEATH BUT, AS USUAL, STILL FUNCTIONING PERFECTLY.

20 SURVIVORS DESCEND TO BASEMENT. SINCE HALF-ORC FIGHTER IS ABSENT, DWARF FIGHTER CASUALLY NOTES THE BASEMENT MASONRY IS "CLEARLY SUPERIOR TO ORCISH WORK."

21 BLADE TRAP DECAPITATES CAVE BEAR.

22 MORNINGSTAR-WIELDING BUGBEARS KILL CLERIC OF KORD.

23 HALF-ORC FIGHTER DISGUISES AS A CHRYSOBERYL TO GET PAST GEM-WORSHIPPING TROGLODYTES.

24 SECOND FIGHTER MEETS "THE ORCS UNDER THE STAIRS," 78 ESCAPED SLAVES WHO LIVE IN A LESS THAN 800' SQUARE CAVERN SUBSISTING ON FUNGUS. STARVING ORC REBELS ARE INSPIRED BY FIGHTER'S TALES OF "IRON RATIONS."

25 UNHOLY TEMPLE CAUSES FIGHTER TO GO PERMANENTLY INSANE JUST FROM LOOKING AT THE WALLS. REST OF PARTY MAKES HASTY EXIT.

26 CLERIC OF BLERRED IS MORALLY OUTRAGED TO FIND 38 ORC SLAVES CONFINED IN 30'x20' CELL.

27 FIRE GIANTS AND BUGBEARS MOUNT FINAL ATTACK ON INCLINED PARTY. JOINED BY DUNGEON KEEPER AND HIS CARNIVOROUS APES, JUST AS THINGS ARE LOOKING BAD, HALF-ORC FIGHTER EMERGES FROM SEALED TUNNELS LEADING FORCE OF ORC REBELS.

28 ADVENTURERS FIND STILL-LIVING ROARKY SWERKED, CLERIC OF PHOLTUS, TIED TO THUMBSCREW. ROARKY RESTORES TO LIFE ALL THE DEAD PARTY MEMBERS (EXCEPT THOSE EATEN BY MANTICORES OR INSANE).

29 TRUFFLE-SNIFFING PIG SMELLS YELLOW MOLD BEHIND SECRET DOOR, ALERTING THE PARTY TO CHIEF NOSNRA'S SECRET TREASURE ROOM. WITHIN ARE 92,329 GP IN GOLD AND JEWELS, TWO TALKING FLAMING SWORDS, AND A MAP SHOWING THE LAIR OF THE HILL GIANTS' FRIENDS, THE EQUALLY AWFUL FROST GIANTS. DISASTER IS NARROWLY AVERTED WHEN THE 244 ORCS INITIALLY INSIST ON EQUAL SHARES OF TREASURE.

* Actual 1978 Gary Gygax D&D pregenerated character name

FINISH 30 THE ADVENTURERS RECEIVE A HEROES' WELCOME.

For saving the Kingdom I pardon your crimes and declare thee KNIGHTS OF GEOFF! This is a most solemn and dignified occasion. O fighter, cleric, magic-us —

I prefer to go by Mandrago the Legendmainix!

Your majesty! My name is Slugg Fap-a-shanter!

31 HALF-ORC FIGHTER DECIDES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HIS ROOTS.



* Do you mind if we sent another 20 guests at your table?

Next Issue: Dragon 09



Join us in *Dragon+* Issue 9 as the thunder rains down on a lofty giant-themed issue, which brings you all the latest on D&D's epic new campaign, Storm King's Thunder, as well as a revealing look at the story of giant kind.



Dragon+ will take an intriguing peek into its crystal ball in a Brief History of Giants exploring D&D giants through the ages, then turn its fearsome gaze on Storm over Neverwinter, as Cryptic Studios reveal more about their upcoming module. Things may well take a turn for the grisly too, as we ponder 10 Horrible Ways That Giants Can Kill You.

On the literary front, *Dragon+* talks to acclaimed Forgotten Realms author, Erin M Evans, in an exclusive interview to learn about the conclusion to her

celebrated Brimstone Angels series. Bumbling traveler and scribe, Volothamp Geddarm, takes another exhaustive but no less hilarious look at those D&D stalwarts, the orcs, in Volo's Guide to Monsters.

We also consider some of the coolest gadgets and gizmos powering the modern game of D&D in a special table tech focused feature and finally, if there's still room in even this giant-sized issue, we'll bring you more of the Best of the Dungeon Masters Guild, with another free adventure.

Find all this and more in Dragon+ Issue 9, appearing this very August.

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A big thank you to the extended D&D family for their help with the creation of this issue.

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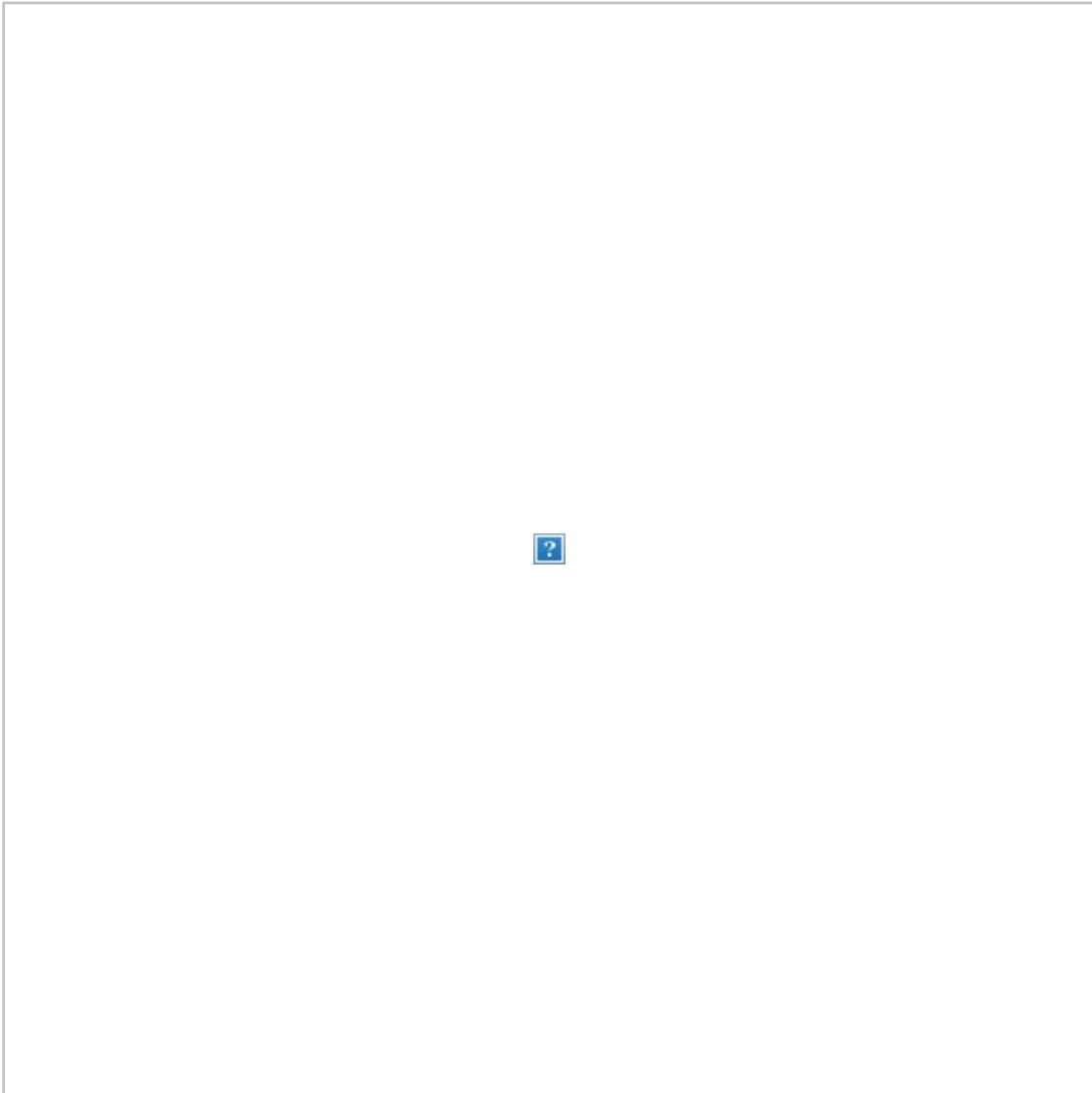
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